



Washington State Fusion Center INFOCUS



WEDNESDAY — 9 FEB 2022

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HEADLINE	02/09 Hong Kong daily infections hit record
SOURCE	https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/hong-kong-reports-first-covid-linked-death-five-months-2022-02-09/
GIST	<p>HONG KONG, Feb 9 (Reuters) - Hong Kong's daily COVID-19 infections nearly doubled to a record 1,161 cases on Wednesday, authorities said, as the global financial hub battles a rapid surge that is shaping as the biggest test yet of its 'dynamic zero' policy.</p> <p>The city has reported close to 4,000 infections over the past two weeks, up from just two in December, taking its tally to more than 17,000 since the outbreak began in 2020, with 215 deaths, although the figures are lower than other major cities in the world.</p> <p>Authorities have responded with the toughest measures since the start of the pandemic, which are taking an increasing social and economic toll on the city's 7.5 million residents.</p> <p>City leader Carrie Lam said on Tuesday that public gatherings of more than 2 people would be banned and added churches and hair salons to most venues, including schools and gyms, which have been forced to close.</p> <p>Many residents rushed to salons for a last haircut ahead of a mandated closure from Thursday.</p> <p>Hong Kong has stuck to a "dynamic zero" strategy employed by mainland China to suppress all coronavirus outbreaks as soon as possible in order to eliminate the virus.</p> <p>Lam said the city was not able to try to live with the virus, like most of the rest of the world is doing, because more than 50% of the elderly have not been vaccinated.</p> <p>About 80% of the city's residents have had at least one vaccine shot but many elderly people have been hesitant.</p> <p>Two elderly patients in their 70s died from coronavirus, authorities said on Wednesday.</p> <p>MASS TESTING</p> <p>Around 200,000 residents and visitors in Discovery Bay, an area that is home to many expatriates, were ordered to test for COVID-19 after the government said it detected coronavirus in sewage samples.</p> <p>Typically, thousands of residents are mandated daily to test if they have been to an area where infections are detected.</p> <p>Among other measures, authorities are implementing a vaccine pass from Feb. 24, which will require proof of vaccination to enter many places, including shopping malls and supermarkets.</p> <p>Flights are down around 90% because of travel restrictions while most people, including the majority of civil servants, are working from home.</p> <p>Fitch Ratings said it was revising down the city's 2022 GDP growth forecast to 1.5% from 3.0% with the "dynamic zero infection" strategy likely to remain until 2023.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/09 WHO: global Covid cases decline 17%
SOURCE	https://www.newsmax.com/newsfront/who-pandemic-coronavirus/2022/02/09/id/1056106/
GIST	The World Health Organization says coronavirus case counts fell 17% worldwide over the last week compared to the previous week, including a 50% drop in the United States, while deaths globally declined 7%.

The weekly epidemiological report from the U.N. health agency, released late Tuesday, shows that the omicron variant is increasingly dominant — making up nearly 97% of all cases tallied by the international virus-tracking platform known as GISAID. Just over 3% were of the delta variant.

“The prevalence of the omicron variant has increased globally and is now detected in almost all countries,” WHO said. “However, many of the countries which reported an early rise in the number of cases due to the omicron variant have now reported a decline in the total number of new cases since the beginning of January 2022.”

All told, WHO reported more than 19 million new cases of COVID-19 and under 68,000 new deaths during the week from Jan. 31 to Feb. 6. As with all such tallies, experts say such figures are believed to greatly underestimate the real toll.

Case counts fell in each of WHO's six regions except its eastern Mediterranean zone, which reported a 36% jump, notably with increases in Afghanistan, Iran and Jordan.

In Europe, case counts fell 7% — led by declines in places like France and Germany — even as countries in eastern Europe like Azerbaijan, Belarus and Russia posted increases. In the Americas, case counts fell 36%, with the United States — still the single most-affected country — reporting 1.87 million new cases, down 50% from the previous week.

WHO cited limited data about the effectiveness of vaccines against the omicron variant, while saying estimates showed reduced protection of the first series of COVID-19 vaccines against the variant for severe disease, symptomatic disease and infection. Vaccines were most effective to prevent severe disease from omicron.

The agency said booster doses increase estimates of vaccine effectiveness to over 75% for all vaccines for which data are available, though the rates declined after three to six months after injection.

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HEADLINE	02/09 Border Patrol getting more DHS attention
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/immigration-mexico-texas-laredo-border-patrols-ba299ad82de8237b9cb55dc53f734dcc
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON (AP) — A strained Border Patrol is getting increased attention from the Biden administration after tense meetings between senior officials and the rank and file while the agency deals with one of the largest spikes in migration along the U.S.-Mexico border in decades.</p> <p>Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, who oversees the Border Patrol, laid out 19 ways to address working conditions after frosty receptions by agents, said Chris Magnus, the new commissioner of Customs and Border Protection.</p> <p>Mayorkas also pledged in a memo to push for more prosecutions of people accused of assaulting CBP personnel in the course of their duties, an issue raised at a recent meeting in Laredo, Texas, and elsewhere, Magnus said Tuesday.</p> <p>“That’s something that agents in the field want to hear because assaults are on the uptick,” Magnus told The Associated Press. “We are not just seeing folks who are fleeing to the U.S. to get away from conditions. We are seeing smugglers, members of cartels, and drug organizations that are actively engaged in doing harm.”</p> <p>Efforts to deal with working conditions for agents come as President Joe Biden has been criticized across the political spectrum over immigration. He has sought to reverse many hardcore policies of his predecessor but has come under fire over the situation at the border that could cause trouble for Democrats in the midterm elections.</p>

CBP encountered migrants from all over the world about 1.7 million times along the U.S.-Mexico border last year. The total, among the highest in decades, is inflated by repeated apprehensions of people who were turned away, without being given a chance to seek asylum, under a public health order issued at the start of the pandemic.

Immigration advocates have condemned the administration for not repealing the public health order, known as Title 42, while critics, including many Border Patrol agents, say a Biden policy of allowing children and families to stay in the country and pursue asylum has encouraged irregular migration.

Magnus said the agents, and the administration, are just trying to manage a complicated situation.

“We’re seeing folks that are encountering political conditions and violence, unsafe conditions to live and work, at unprecedented levels,” the former police chief of Tucson, Arizona, said in an interview, the first since he was sworn in Friday. “We’ve seen, for example, in places, earthquakes or other environmental conditions. We’re seeing unprecedented levels of poverty. All of these are things that are in many ways, you know, pushing migrants again at high levels to this country.”

The administration has sought to address the cause of migration, including by increasing aid to Central America and re-starting a visa program that was ended under President Donald Trump. It has also sought assistance from other countries, including Mexico, to do more to stop or take in migrants.

As the overall numbers have increased, and the administration has decided to allow many families to stay and seek asylum in a process that can take years, some Border Patrol agents have grown disenchanted as they spend their shifts processing and transporting people, not out in the field.

That frustration boiled over in Laredo as agents met late last month with Mayorkas and Border Patrol Chief Raul Ortiz, who acknowledged morale was at an “all-time low,” according to a leaked video published by the Washington Examiner. One agent complained about “doing nothing” except releasing people into the United States, referring to the practice of allowing migrants to remain free while their cases wind through immigration court.

At another meeting, in Yuma, Arizona, Mayorkas told agents he understood that apprehending families and children “is not what you signed up to do” and that their jobs were becoming more challenging amid an influx of Cubans, Nicaraguans and Venezuelans, according to video published by the conservative website Townhall. One of the agents turned his back on the secretary.

Magnus has heard similar concerns raised in meetings. “I think it has been difficult for many of them who spent most of their careers or anticipated that their careers would be largely working in the field, on the border,” he said.

The commissioner declined to specify the 19 areas where Mayorkas “wants to see improvement,” because they have not been publicly released. But another official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss internal plans, said they include expanding the role of a new class of civilian employees to add tasks such as transporting migrants to medical facilities so agents can return to other duties.

Another point calls for faster decisions on asylum cases at the border. Agents have expressed frustration that asylum-seekers are freed in the U.S., often for years, while their claims make their way through a system backlogged with about 1.6 million cases.

Magnus said he hopes to expand mental health services for agents and provide additional resources to help them and their families cope with a stressful job that requires them to move often.

“There is never one simple solution to addressing morale at any organization, but I absolutely appreciate the very challenging conditions that the men and women of the Border Patrol and CBP in general have been have been working under,” he said.

HEADLINE	02/09 Ukraine projects calm despite US rhetoric
SOURCE	https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-europe-russia-cd62d3b5ac6f71e8d654a99de84799da
GIST	<p>ADIIVKA, Ukraine (AP) — In the trenches of eastern Ukraine, across the lines from some of the 100,000 Russian troops amassed north and east of the country, Ivan Skuratovskyi's calm verges on numbness — even after a sniper's bullet recently killed one of the 50 or so men under his command.</p> <p>It is the sort of thing that has happened from time to time over the eight years he's been deployed up and down the 250-mile (400-kilometer) front line — a soldier in a war he never imagined when he enlisted in 2013. He grieves, but death and conflict have become an inescapable part of his life.</p> <p>"The war has put pressure on me and broken my soul," said Skuratovskyi, 30. "I'm becoming more cold-hearted, some would say dead-hearted. I have a tough sense of humor. It's a protective reaction to extreme situations."</p> <p>U.S. officials say the threat of a Russian invasion in Ukraine is more serious than others that have come and gone during nearly a decade of trench warfare. The White House national security advisor warned that an all-out invasion could happen any day, and President Joe Biden said "it would be wise" for Americans other than essential diplomats to leave Ukraine and ordered the deployment of 1,700 troops to neighboring Poland.</p> <p>But even as the rhetoric out of Washington ramps up, a sense of calm prevails in the Eastern European nation among soldiers and citizens alike, from relatives of those in the trenches on up to President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who campaigned on a promise of ending the drawn-out conflict and has repeatedly called for diplomacy to carry the day.</p> <p>"We are defending our country and are on our own territory. Our patience can have an impact on provocations, when we don't respond to provocations but behave with great dignity," Zelenskyy said Tuesday in an appearance with French President Emmanuel Macron.</p> <p>While waves of Ukrainians fled their homes during 2014 fighting that saw Russia annex the Crimean Peninsula and back separatists in the eastern province of Donbas, so far people are staying put in the areas closest to the Russian troop movements.</p> <p>The calm expressed by Zelenskyy and others owes in part, perhaps, to the fact that they have little control over the situation before them.</p> <p>Ukraine is vastly overmatched by Russia not only in troop numbers but in arms and equipment, such as the fighter jets poised nearby and the naval ships maneuvering off the coast. Nothing NATO countries have provided to Ukraine — from anti-tank weapons sent by Britain to the 5,000 helmets that came from Germany — comes close to evening the scales.</p> <p>American officials have said explicitly that no U.S. troops will fight in Ukraine.</p> <p>Macron, for his part, spoke Tuesday not of a looming possible invasion but of a tense standoff that could go on for "weeks and months to come."</p> <p>U.S. officials believe the danger is much more immediate — and haven't been shy about sounding the alarm.</p> <p>"Our effort is to ensure we're informing the American public and the global community of the seriousness of this threat," White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said last week when asked about the difference in tone between Washington and Kyiv. "I can't speak to the motivation or the reasoning for the comments of Ukrainian leadership."</p>

The two governments share the same motivation, averting an invasion, but may see themselves as speaking to different audiences.

The White House believes that spotlighting concerns about possible military action will dissuade the Kremlin from following through on it, according to a senior administration official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Biden and his advisers have calculated that publicly airing those concerns, as well as intelligence details, helps make the case to European allies for sanctions in the event that Russian President Vladimir Putin orders a further invasion of Ukraine, the official said.

Zelenskyy, meanwhile, is balancing military concerns against fears that alarming rhetoric could wreck Ukraine's economy with hardly a shot fired.

The dueling messaging stems from differing assessments by the two countries as to Russia's intentions, said Daniel Fried, who advised the George W. Bush administration on former Soviet nations and served as ambassador to Poland.

"Zelenskyy looks to be thinking about a longer term," he said. "He seems to be worried about the effect of a prolonged crisis on the Ukrainian economy. And he may feel that Putin is less likely to invade than he is to try to use the threat of invasion to grind down the Ukrainian economy" and scare away foreign investors.

"So he wants to portray a sense of, 'We can get through this,'" Fried said.

Zelenskyy's administration is also keenly aware that Ukrainian public opinion is divided on how to handle the situation, especially when it comes to concessions toward pro-Russia separatists in the east.

Memories are still raw: Yuri Maskirenko, one of those forced to leave Crimea after the occupation, said he thinks Ukraine shouldn't negotiate with Russia over the status of Donbas or else "people will come out into the streets and this will not lead to anything good."

From his front-line vantage point, Skuratovskiy, who recently reupped with the army for another two years, agrees with a diplomacy-focused approach and said he sees no armed solution to the standoff.

"Weapons won't solve any problem here," Skuratovskiy said.

He talks regularly by video call from his current post in the town of Adiiivka, Donbas province, with his wife, Maryna, on the other side of the country in the seaside city of Mykolaiv, near Moldova. Maryna said her worst moment came in 2014 when an explosion went off while he was on the line with her. Sometimes she has thought he might not make it home alive.

But while she and friends in Mykolaiv talk about the possibility of war, none of them are panicked. She yearns for the conflict to end and to finally be able to make a home with her husband, who has been deployed for nearly his entire adult life.

"Vanya would tell me if something was going to happen," she said, using an affectionate nickname for her husband. "Since he doesn't, I'm calm about the situation."

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HEADLINE	02/09 New Iran missile can reach Israel?
SOURCE	https://www.timesofisrael.com/iran-unveils-new-missile-said-to-put-israel-us-regional-bases-within-range/
GIST	TEHRAN, Iran — Iran unveiled a new missile on Wednesday with a reported range that would allow it to reach both US bases in the region as well as targets inside Israel.

	<p>State TV reported that the missile has solid fuel and a range of 1,450 kilometers, or 900 miles. It is called the Khaibar-Shekan, a reference to a Jewish castle overrun by Muslim warriors in the early days of Islam.</p> <p>It said the missile has high accuracy, is manufactured completely domestically, and can defeat missile shield systems. The information has not been independently verified.</p> <p>Israel's closest point to Iran is some 1,000 kilometers, or 620 miles, away.</p> <p>The report comes as negotiations continue in Vienna to revive Tehran's tattered nuclear deal with world powers.</p> <p>Iran, which has long said it does not seek nuclear weapons, insists its missile program is only a deterrent.</p> <p>Iran has missiles that can travel up to 2,000 kilometers (1,250 miles).</p> <p>Earlier in January Iran tested an engine for a solid-fuel rocket designed to launch satellites.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 CDC: not yet time change masks guidelines
SOURCE	https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/08/health/covid-mask-guidance-cdc-director/index.html
GIST	<p>(CNN)The head of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is standing by the agency's mask guidelines, emphasizing Tuesday that now is not the time to change the recommendations or loosen restrictions aimed at preventing Covid-19.</p> <p>The CDC "still recommends that all schools encourage students to wear well-fitting masks consistently and while indoors. And that's consistent with our guidance that still also recommends that people mask in public indoor settings in areas of high or substantial transmission," CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky said in a radio interview with WYPR's Tom Hall on Tuesday's edition of the show "Midday."</p> <p>"Right now, we still have about 290,000 cases every single day, and our hospitalization rates now are higher than they even were at the peak of our Delta surge," Walensky said. "So in this moment -- while we are looking ahead and planning ahead, and we'll continue to evaluate and follow the science -- our recommendations are consistent with encouraging students to wear well-fitting masks."</p> <p>A growing number of states, from California to Delaware, have announced this week their intentions to drop indoor mask mandates in the coming days. Some others, like Connecticut and New Jersey, are eliminating mask mandates in schools.</p> <p>Walensky noted that states and municipalities can determine their own policies.</p> <p>According to the CDC, 99% of US counties still have high levels of coronavirus transmission. Walensky said she was cautiously optimistic about case numbers dropping from the peak of the Omicron surge but said that at the moment, those numbers are still too high for the agency to consider lifting any mitigation measures.</p> <p>"We owe it to our children to make sure that they can safely stay in school. Right now, that includes masking. We've seen outbreaks that have occurred in communities where students were not masked in schools and had to close," she said. "And much of our guidance is based on the amount of community transmission."</p> <p>Some governors and public health experts have called for the White House to release guidance on what Covid-19 metrics could help determine the appropriate time to lift measures and transition out of the pandemic phase and into an endemic phase. But there is no specific number of cases that Walensky considers as a benchmark for changing guidance.</p>

"I don't necessarily look at a magic number. What I do think is a really important barometer is how our hospitals are doing," Walensky said.

"Are hospitals able to, you know, take care of the car accidents, the heart attacks and strokes that routinely walk in the door because they are not at capacity taking care of patients with Covid-19? And right now across the country, our hospitals are still in crunch mode," she said. "They still have real challenges with capacity."

Public health experts forecast that eventually, Covid-19 could become "endemic," meaning the disease has a constant presence in a population but isn't overwhelming health systems, stressing hospitals or affecting an alarmingly large number of people, as typically seen in a pandemic.

About 108,000 people are currently hospitalized with Covid-19, according to data from the US Department of Health and Human Services.

Masks should be worn indoors for a few more weeks, other experts say

People should continue wearing masks indoors for a few more weeks, Dr. Paul Offit, director of the Vaccine Education Center at The Children's Hospital in Philadelphia, said Tuesday. He added that although the Covid-19 situation is improving, cases and deaths remain high.

"Right now, we have about 90% population immunity, meaning people who have either been naturally infected or immunized or both -- that's good. We're moving into the warmer climates -- that's good. This is really basically, at its heart, a winter virus. The numbers are way down from where they had been -- that's good. But you still had 150,000 cases yesterday and 1,000 deaths. That's still a lot of cases and deaths," Offit told CNN's Bianna Golodryga on CNN Newsroom.

"So, what I would say is, independent of whether there's mandates or not, I think people should reasonably wear masks when they're indoors for the next few weeks, until we're much farther down than where we are right now," Offit said. "We're almost there, if you could just hang in there for a few more weeks."

A World Health Organization official also has urged people to keep wearing masks indoors.

"We are recommending to continue to wear masks, particularly when you're in close proximity with other people, but especially when you're indoors and even if you're vaccinated," Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead for Covid-19, said during a social media Q&A session Tuesday.

"We are still allowing this virus to circulate in some situations unchecked, and that's dangerous," she said. "We shouldn't be doing that three years into this pandemic."

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HEADLINE	02/08 Covid deaths highest in a year
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/health/2022/02/08/omicron-deaths-covid/
GIST	<p>Though considered milder than other coronavirus variants, omicron has infected so many people that it has driven the number of daily deaths beyond where it was last spring, before vaccines were widely available, according to Washington Post data.</p> <p>Omicron has been particularly lethal to people over 75, the unvaccinated and the medically vulnerable, according to doctors and public health officials. The soaring death toll also illustrates why experts pleaded with the public to beware of the highly contagious variant even though it is less virulent than others.</p> <p>"That feels quite jarring to people who may have assumed omicron is generally on a per-case level less severe and given the fact we have vaccinated at least some portion of the country," said Jennifer Nuzzo, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. "Even if on a per-case basis fewer people develop severe illness and die, when you apply a small percentage to a very large number, you get a substantial number."</p>

Yet the seven-day average of deaths during the omicron surge has reached 2,600 in recent days, climbing past the late September peak of about 2,000 average daily fatalities during the surge of the more dangerous delta variant, according to Post tracking. The ranks of hospitalized patients with covid-19 reached record highs in January. Coronavirus deaths lag hospitalizations.

More than 900,000 Americans have died of covid-19.

The latest victims tend to be older, according to a Post review of federal data. Nearly half of the deaths in January 2022 were among those 75 and older, compared to about a third in September.

Experts theorized hospitalizations and deaths during the delta surge skewed younger because of high rates of vaccination among senior citizens and the delta variant appearing to cause particularly severe illness among middle-aged adults compared to earlier surges. Now the age distribution of deaths resembles the deadliest stage of the pandemic last winter, when more than 3,000 were dying a day.

Jason Salemi, an epidemiologist at the University of South Florida College of Public Health, said Florida has seen similar age trends, with seniors making up about 85 percent of deaths last winter, about 60 percent during the delta surge and back to about 80 percent in the omicron surge. He suspects factors include seniors who were recently vaccinated during the delta surge but did not get boosters ahead of omicron and higher raw numbers of seniors infected in the latest wave.

“Omicron may be less severe for younger people, but it will still find vulnerable seniors in our community,” Salemi said. “That vaccination back in February isn’t as effective now if you aren’t boosted.”

Several states including Illinois are seeing deaths on par with last winter’s peak.

Illinois averaged more than 150 deaths a day in the last week of January, compared to the all-time peak of about 180 in December 2020. But Illinois also saw the lowest case-to-death ratio of any coronavirus wave, a spokeswoman for the state health department said.

Advocate Aurora Health, Illinois’ largest health system, has seen an in-hospital mortality rate for covid-19 patients decline from about 20 percent at the start of the pandemic to under 2 percent now.

“You are flooding the system with so many patients that the crude number of deaths is going to be higher, but what we really focus on is the death rate,” said Robert Citronberg, Advocate Aurora Health’s executive medical director of infectious disease and prevention. He noted nearly all the latest deaths have been among the unvaccinated.

“There’s also a big group of patients who are politically motivated and don’t want to be told what to do,” Citronberg said. “They are willing to die from this disease because they don’t want to be told what to do, and it’s basically crazy.”

Chicago recorded more than 1,000 covid-19 fatalities in the past two months, almost matching a December 2020 daily peak of about 30 deaths in mid-January. About half of the recent victims are Black in a city that’s about a third Black. And 27 of the dead were adults under the age of 40.

Public health officials have also stressed death rates barely budged among the vaccinated and boosted while surging for older unvaccinated adults. The city reported an age-adjusted death rate peaking at 14 per 100,000 for the unvaccinated around Jan. 22 compared to about 1 per 100,000 for the boosted.

“It’s been challenging because it goes up against the national narrative that omicron is nothing dangerous,” said Allison Arwady, commissioner of the Chicago Department of Public Health. “I don’t think society wants to be a place where we are talking about 30 deaths a day.”

Public health officials such as Arwady are facing similar challenges in trying to communicate the conflicting nature of omicron: It poses a lower risk to individuals but a greater risk to society when the vulnerable face the highest likelihood yet of contracting the virus during a massive surge.

Wes Stubblefield, a northern and northeastern district medical officer for the Alabama Department of Public Health, says recent deaths are concentrated among those older than 75 even as cases are concentrated among the 25-to-49 age group. Deaths are still rising in the South, which started experiencing omicron surges later than the Northeast, although they tend to be lower than during the delta surge when unvaccinated people were at high risk.

“This disease is still killing Alabamians. It’s still a severe illness; it’s still more deadly than other common respiratory illnesses; it’s something people should take very seriously, especially those who have underlying conditions,” Stubblefield said. “What we’ve tried to mention to people is that people can still spread disease to their loved ones even if they are healthy.”

Hospitals are seeing the consequences of the massive spread in the patients dying in their intensive care units as the most vulnerable are unable to fight off the virus.

While the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center has seen fewer of its hospitalized patients die in the most recent surge, those who do are older than their counterparts during the delta surge, said Oscar C. Marroquin, the medical system’s chief health-care data and analytics officer.

During the previous surge, the average age of patients who died was 68.4. During the omicron period, it is 74.2, according to Marroquin’s data.

Most of the current fatalities are among unvaccinated patients and a significant number are immunosuppressed because they are undergoing chemotherapy, have received an organ transplant or have a disease that harms the immune system, Marroquin said.

Other hospitals have been raising alarms about immunocompromised patients, whose systems struggle to generate antibodies to fight off coronavirus even after vaccination. Colin L. Powell, the former U.S. secretary of state, was one of the highest-profile examples when he died of covid-19 complications while also being treated for a blood cancer that severely impairs the immune system.

Andrew Myers, director of inpatient covid care at Tampa General Hospital, said the record levels of patients his hospital has seen in the latest outbreak has included more immunocompromised patients who take the virus seriously but had a harder time dodging omicron.

When a variant such as omicron rapidly spreads through the population at once and requires less exposure time to infect, an immunocompromised person is more likely to get infected when a loved one visits or during routine activities.

“It’s really unfortunate for them when something like this is spreading because if you are unable to have that extra protection, it makes life a whole lot more difficult,” Myers said.

“Even if you feel fine as a 25-year-old or 35-year-old, one, you are taking a chance, a small chance,” he added. “But two, you don’t know who else you can infect. You don’t know if that lady sitting next to you outside or the lady you work with at the store are immunocompromised or if they have someone at home who is immunocompromised. It’s a butterfly effect.”

The recent uptick in coronavirus deaths also probably includes residual deaths from delta surges that were just starting to hit parts of the country including New England in late fall, before omicron became the dominant strain of the virus.

“We don’t know what kind of variant a person sitting in front of us has and because we keep people in the hospital alive for weeks, many of the deaths that occurred over the last several weeks were residual delta

	<p>infections,” said Shira Doron, hospital epidemiologist at Tufts Medical Center, where nearly 30 patients died in December and January.</p> <p>Some hospitals have also seen growing numbers of patients with covid-19 when they died of other causes because of the sheer volume of infections. Such deaths would not have covid-19 listed as a primary cause and drive up the latest numbers, but they do reflect a changing dynamic for health care in the pandemic.</p> <p>“It’s not a black-or-white phenomenon,” said John Rimmer, chief medical officer of CarePoint, which operates three hospitals in New Jersey. “Covid has become a co-morbidity many patients are presenting with. Just like someone with diabetes may not heal as well, someone with covid may not heal as well.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Russia invasion now less likely?
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/8/russian-invasion-ukraine-seems-less-likely-element/
GIST	<p>It may be the least surprising invasion in recent history, should it ever take place.</p> <p>Having spent months moving troops, ships, weapons and equipment to the Ukrainian border, any Russian move into its neighbor’s territory will have completely lost all element of surprise and the host of military advantages that come with it.</p> <p>It has been a drawn-out, deliberate process that has some military strategists and war game designers scratching their heads. In Kyiv, Paris and Washington, heads of state and military planners have had ample time to repeatedly sound the alarm that a Russian invasion may be coming, coordinate a response and help bolster the capabilities of Ukrainian forces on the country’s eastern front, who have spent many weeks fortifying their defensive positions in preparation for war.</p> <p>Cracks may have emerged among NATO allies as to how best to respond to Russian aggression, but there is little doubt that the Kremlin has decreased the chances that a large-scale military invasion could succeed by slow-walking its mobilization. Indeed, the most appealing window of opportunity may have been the holiday season, when fears of an invasion were nearing their peak and Russia’s Western adversaries were still scrambling to organize a defense.</p> <p>The clear predictability of an invasion adds to what analysts say is an unappealing reality for Russian President Vladimir Putin and the country’s military officials, who virtually guarantee more Russian casualties with each day that passes before launching an invasion.</p> <p>“I think that the Russians will, in the end, realize that an invasion will be no joke for them either. It will cost thousands of lives. It will inflict, if it takes place, untold damage and suffering. And it will not get them anywhere,” journalist and renowned Russia expert David Satter said in a recent conversation with The Washington Times.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/09 Patriot Front applicants linked to military?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/09/white-supremacist-group-patriot-front-one-in-five-applicants-tied-to-us-military
GIST	<p>Nearly one in five applicants to the white supremacist group Patriot Front claimed to hold current or former ties to the US military, according to leaked documents published and reviewed by the Southern Poverty Law Center and alternative media collective Unicorn Riot.</p> <p>Some 18 out of the 87 applicants, or 21%, said they were currently or previously affiliated with the military. One applicant, who claimed to be a former Marine, also said he currently worked for the Department of Homeland Security, according to the SPLC’s Hatewatch, a blog that tracks and exposes activities of American rightwing extremists.</p>

A white supremacist and neo-fascist hate group, Patriot Front emerged as a rebrand of the neo-Nazi organization Vanguard America in the aftermath of the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

[According to](#) the SPLC, the Patriot Front “represents one of the most prominent white supremacist groups in the country” and is led by Thomas Rousseau, a 23-year old man based in Dallas, Texas. “A nation within a nation is our goal. Our people face complete annihilation as our culture and heritage are attacked from all sides,” Rousseau once [said](#).

In January, Unicorn Riot published over 400 gigabytes of data that included “ostensibly private, unedited videos and direct messages [that] reveal a campaign to organize acts of hatred while indoctrinating teenagers into national socialism (Nazism),” the journalist collective [said](#).

Group members and applicants expressed an open admiration for Nazi ideologies, with the latter expressing various [motivations](#) for joining the group.

One applicant, who said he lived in San Diego, claimed to be a current DHS employee and told Patriot Front he was inspired to join after he “found out about the Jews while in the marines”.

Another applicant used derogatory language about LGBTQ+ people and said he “first saw” them during his time in the military.

Someone else from Salt Lake City said he “shifted focus and questioned things” after his second deployment and went from being a Republican to joining the far right.

Applicants also touted their various skill sets, including “great land-navigation, great physical fitness, able to clear rooms” and “basic medical training”. Others said they had been “trained in firearms”. One claimed to train people in “marine corps martial arts” and said he was the leader of the Kansas Active Club, an affiliate of the Rise Above Movement, a Southern California-based SPLC-designated hate group.

In addition to alleged military affiliations, the leak also revealed that the group targets minors. [According to](#) Unicorn Riot, Patriot Front recruits “members through the internet who are still legally minors, indoctrinating them with white supremacist ideology and even encouraging them to lie to their parents so the group can transport them across state lines for fascist events”.

Patriot Front’s official policies require members to be at least 17 and a half years old, but it “goes by a case by case basis” with certain members being below that age.

In the past year, there has been growing concern surrounding the far-right radicalization of current and former military members. More than [80 defendants](#) charged for their affiliation with the deadly January 6 riots have been found to have ties to the military, with most being veterans.

Last March, the Pentagon released a [report](#) that cited domestic extremist groups posing an increasing threat to the military by attempting to recruit service members and in certain situations join the military to gain combat experience.

“Military members are highly prized by these groups as they bring legitimacy to their causes and enhance their ability to carry out attacks,” the report said. “In addition to potential violence, white supremacy and white nationalism pose a threat to the good order and discipline within the military,” it added.

In October, a House panel convened to discuss ways to address veterans being increasingly targeted for recruitment by extremist groups.

“They provide them with a tribe, a simplistic view of the world and its problems, actionable solutions and a sense of purpose, and then they feed these vulnerable individuals a concoction of lies and an unrelenting narrative of political and social grievance,” retired Marine Lt Col Joe Plenzler [said](#) at the panel.

	A study last year by the Center for Strategic and International Studies found that in 2020, 6.4% of all domestic terror attacks and plots were committed by active-duty or reserve personnel, up from 1.5% in 2019 and none in 2018.
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HEADLINE	02/08 Covid relief funds drive up nurses' pay
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/covid-19-relief-funds-drive-up-nurse-pay-hospitals-say-11644316203?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>Hospitals and lawmakers are pressing the Biden administration to review federal pandemic-relief programs that they say have distorted pay rates for travel nurses.</p> <p>Many nurses are making twice what they did before the pandemic or more on assignments at hospitals paying top dollar to fill big holes in their workforces.</p> <p>Some hospitals are using federal Covid-19 relief funds to cover part of the difference between rates for travel nurses and staff salaries.</p> <p>Health-industry trade groups and some members of Congress say staffing agencies matching workers with hospitals are capitalizing on a tight labor market, as many nurses have left during the pandemic, often because of burnout and fatigue.</p> <p>Staffing companies say the higher pay rates are simply a matter of supply and demand. “It’s kind of like saying real-estate agents set the price. The buyers and sellers participating in the market do,” said Alan Braynin, president and chief executive officer at Aya Healthcare, the largest healthcare staffing agency in the U.S.</p> <p>Almost 200 House lawmakers led by Reps. Peter Welch (D., Vt.) and Morgan Griffith (R., Va.) on Jan. 25 asked the White House to investigate the run-up in wages that staffing agencies pay contract nurses. Trade groups the American Hospital Association, the American Health Care Association and National Center for Assisted Living wrote recently to the White House that staffing firms are exploiting the pandemic by charging exorbitant prices.</p> <p>The lawmakers and trade groups say federal Covid-19 relief funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency are putting upward pressure on wages. FEMA in January said Hawaii would get \$95 million for traveling healthcare workers, for instance, and Texas has used billions of dollars in federal relief funds to help cover travel-nursing costs.</p> <p>White House officials say they have taken steps to alleviate the nursing shortage and pressure on wages. The federal government is connecting healthcare providers to communities that need workers through grants and loan repayments and providing funds to hospitals to recruit staff, according to a White House spokesman.</p> <p>The bidding war for temporary nurses reflects a healthcare system under strain but a boon for some in the labor force. Covid-19 intensified a longstanding labor shortfall and gave nurses new leverage over their employers. The National Institutes of Health estimates that there was a shortage of about 1 million nurses in the U.S. in 2020 before the pandemic, the most recent year for which an estimate was available.</p> <p>Pay for travel nurses jumped to \$3,290 a week in December 2021 from \$1,706 in December 2019, according to Vivian Health, an online healthcare labor marketplace. The travel-nursing industry has doubled in size over the past year, said Parth Bhakta, Vivian Health’s chief executive, generating millions of dollars in revenue for what were once largely small and regional staffing agencies.</p> <p>One staffing firm, SnapNurse, advertised last year for nurses to travel to Alaska on 90-day assignments for upward of \$5,000 a week. That is more than three times the median pay for a registered nurse, according</p>

to Bureau of Labor Statistics figures. The pay was backed by a FEMA award of two staffing contracts worth \$107 million to SnapNurse and its partner [DLH Holdings](#) Corp.

SnapNurse allows nurses to register via a smartphone app for potential assignments. More than 250,000 nurses are registered on the platform, said founder Cherie Kloss, up from 10,000 before the pandemic. Revenue grew from about \$1 million in 2018 to more than \$1 billion for 2021, Ms. Kloss said.

SnapNurse said it isn't overcharging hospitals. Hospitals and state health departments set pay rates, the company said. "Supplying more nurses into the field is going to be the only solution to lowering the costs of nursing per hour," Ms. Kloss said. DLH declined to comment.

Alaska worked with hospitals to set wages for the contract awarded to SnapNurse and DLH after a competitive bidding process, said Anne Zink, the state's chief medical officer.

"It's really hard to convince nurses to come up to Alaska when it's minus-20 degrees in the middle of winter," she said. "This was a short-term fix for a really severe problem that was causing a lot of Alaskans to not be able to get the care they needed."

In August, Mississippi approved a federally backed contract to SnapNurse and three other staffing companies that cost about \$12 million a week to hire over 1,000 nurses, respiratory therapists and paramedics to deal with pandemic-related shortages. The contract works out to roughly \$11,470 a week per medical professional hired.

Stephen McCraney, executive director of the state's emergency management agency, said demand for essential workers is unlike anything he has seen before.

"Usually a hurricane hits two or three states, so those states would get the resources at a low cost," Mr. McCraney said. "But when we're in competition with all 50 states for the same kind of assets, it's a much different situation. I think it was supply and demand, more than the federal subsidy, driving costs up."

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HEADLINE	02/08 Govt. funding stopgap thru mid-March?
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/house-passes-stopgap-measure-funding-government-through-mid-march-11644360872?mod=hp_listb_pos2
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The House passed legislation to keep the government funded through mid-March, advancing a temporary fix that will give negotiators time to reach a global agreement on fiscal 2022 spending after weeks of negotiations failed to yield a deal.</p> <p>The 272-162 vote sends the bill to the Senate, which plans to take it up quickly to avoid a partial government shutdown. The government is currently funded through Feb. 18 under an interim measure that keeps spending at levels in place during fiscal 2021, which ended in September.</p> <p>"While negotiations on a full-year funding agreement continue, we will in the meantime avoid a pointless and costly government shutdown," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D., N.Y.) said. He said that talks were making good progress and that he was optimistic that Democrats and Republicans will arrive at a top-line deal for an omnibus bill.</p> <p>The three-week continuing resolution will keep the government funded through March 11. Such interim spending bills keep the government funded at levels in place for the prior fiscal year and maintain spending priorities, preventing agencies and departments from allocating money to new programs.</p> <p>Republicans made a new offer to Democrats on Monday and then made a counteroffer to Democrats' initial response.</p>

“We’ve been moving,” said Sen. Richard Shelby (R., Ala.), the top Republican on the Senate Appropriations Committee. “We’re close.”

Republicans and Democrats have been locked in a fight over parity in increases for defense and nondefense spending. Senate Democrats last year proposed a \$29 billion increase in the Defense Department appropriations bill, to \$725.8 billion. That was a smaller increase on a percentage basis than for spending outside defense. In their draft measure, Senate Democrats declined to put extra defense money into a contingency fund that had been relied on for more than a decade for military spending that exceeded limits in omnibus spending bills.

The interim measure includes a handful of so-called anomalies that direct the government to deviate from a straight extension of the existing spending bill. Those include \$350 million to address water contamination from the Red Hill Bulk Fuel Storage Facility in Hawaii and a \$100 million increase in the cap on providing existing defense equipment to foreign partners, a change that could help the Biden administration provide military supplies to Ukraine.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) said that parity in defense and nondefense spending wasn’t negotiable and that Republicans would also insist on a ban in federal spending on most abortions, continuing a longstanding policy. Democrats, who control both chambers of Congress, have advanced appropriations bills that would undo the abortion ban, known as the Hyde amendment after the lawmaker who sponsored the policy.

“That’s been the big picture for months now,” Mr. McConnell said. “Parity for defense; keeping longstanding bipartisan policy riders in; and keeping new poison pills out. With these basic things, a bipartisan deal should be achievable. Without them, one will be impossible.”

Republicans have leverage in the 50-50 Senate because 60 votes are needed to pass most legislation.

Congress is haggling over spending without the guardrails of the 2011 Budget Control Act, which was designed to force compromise by triggering automatic spending cuts in the absence of an agreement on defense and nondefense funding. With the law’s expiration, the two parties have less incentive to abide by the principle of parity in military and nonmilitary spending increases.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Seattle police fewest on-record stops 2021
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3341898/spd-terry-stops-2021/
GIST	<p>The Seattle Police Monitor, appointed by the U.S. District Court in oversight of the Seattle Police Department’s consent decree, has found that, on data collection and analysis of Terry stops in 2021 and years prior, SPD performed the fewest number of stops on record, racial minorities were more likely to be stopped, and the white population was more likely to be in possession of a firearm.</p> <p>A Terry stop refers to law enforcement’s ability to perform an investigation upon reasonable suspicion. The disparity of frequency of Terry stops among racial demographics was a predicate for the Department of Justice’s ruling on its consent decree in July 2012, noting SPD’s “inadequate supervision and training of officers” and insufficient data collection to “self assess.”</p> <p>A report released Tuesday provides summary and analysis of SPD’s stops and detentions in 2021. The report is part of a series of “community engagement sessions” intended to inform final review of the decree.</p> <p>It finds that SPD conducted 4,282 Terry stops in 2021, noting that number is 30% below 2020 (6,157), and 52% below the recorded high in 2018 (8,883).</p> <p>It goes on to outline frequency of stops among racial demographics between 2015 and 2020. As a proportion of total stops between 2018 and 2020, 33% were Black, 56% white, 4% Asian, 3% Native American. Hispanic ends as a racial category in 2019. “Unknown” is excluded as a category.</p>

“Undoubtedly, the characteristics of the population of stopped subjects in 2018 through 2020 do not match the Seattle population, as has been found previously,” the report notes.

Separate data on frisks is used to note decrease in frisk rates among racial minorities when compared with the white population.

“Differences in frisk rates across races have reduced over time, from a gap of 11 percentage points in 2015 to 5 percentage points in 2020. Frisk rates for stopped individuals ranged 7% across races, with a low of 20% for White subjects to a high of 27% for Asian and Black subjects, between 2018 and 2020,” the report reads.

As explanation of Terry stops’ inconsistencies when compared with general population demographics, the report goes to great length to introduce mitigating factors which point away from racial profiling and bias as reason for the discrepancy.

“In a variety of contexts in current law, racial disparities by themselves do not necessarily prove bias by individual police officers or agencies – as they operate within the context of social factors that may contribute to disparities,” the report adds.

“Population-based analyses present insights but also do not, by themselves, tell a complete story regarding disparity or potential bias, since other sociological factors may impact policing disparities as they do in other areas of society.”

“Neither the Consent Decree nor the Court-approved policies on stops and bias-free policing demand that SPD immediately stop practices that it may determine are linked to disparate impacts.”

That summary is contextualized with the caveat that “while disparity analyses may have limited ability to determine bias, this does not mean disparity findings lack meaning or import.”

Other notable findings from the report include that white subjects were most likely to be in possession of a weapon upon a Terry stop, “10 percentage points higher than frisks of Black individuals.”

As ultimate recommendation, the report offers “re-engagement” with the Community Police Commission, another court appointed group tasked with providing community feedback on police reform. The report “lauds” SPD’s data collection and “maturation” as it relates to identifying racial bias among officers.

“Whereas SPD lacked the ability to ‘self-assess’ regarding disparities at the start of the Consent Decree, it is now a leader in policing analytics and regularly provides guidance to other police departments in this area and others.”

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HEADLINE	02/08 Battle to change police accountability laws
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3341277/law-enforcement-reform-advocates-clash-changes-police-accountability-laws/
GIST	<p>Law enforcement in Washington has been pushing for new bills during the 2022 legislative session that they say are crucial to clarifying police accountability laws passed last year. Amid that push, advocates that led efforts for 2021’s changes claim that proposed edits could unravel positive steps toward police reform.</p> <p>In several instances, police have alleged that the laws passed in 2021 have prevented them from addressing a range of active crimes, particularly related to mental health crises and caretaking calls. And while state Attorney General Bob Ferguson issued a memorandum last August saying that nothing in the new laws should limit police from responding to either type of call, law enforcement has remained cautious in its own interpretation.</p>

Police have also expressed further concerns about limitations imposed on their ability to engage in pursuits, highlighting several incidents over the last year where they claimed 2021's reforms prevented them from pursuing suspects related to crimes like car theft and murder.

In order to address that, the state Legislature is considering a pair of bills: [HB 2037](#) and [HB 1788](#).

HB 2037 would expand the ability of officers to use physical force, provided they have probable cause to believe a suspect has committed a criminal offense, and to "prevent a person from fleeing" when stopped by police for "temporary investigation detention."

HB 1788 would allow officers to engage in vehicle pursuits based on reasonable suspicion that a person in the vehicle has committed a crime, "subject to certain safety restrictions."

Supporters claim the legislation would provide necessary clarity to 2021's laws, which they say have left police with too much uncertainty in how they're supposed to respond to calls where public safety hangs in the balance.

But advocates for police reform have been vocal in their opposition to both bills.

"Rolling back these laws in response to a campaign of disinformation of fear risks the safety of people of color across the state," Washington Coalition for Police Accountability (WCPA) advocate Leslie Cushman said [in a legislative update last week](#). "They are a huge step backwards on racial justice, on reducing police violence, and on police accountability."

In the past, the WCPA has accused police in Washington of willfully misinterpreting the state's recently-passed accountability laws, [claiming last August](#) that officers "have done everything in their efforts to undermine" the legislation since it was first implemented.

Cushman and others have criticized HB 2037 and HB 1788 as attempts to "undo the significant work done last year to address police use of force," detailing their own concerns over [a recent report](#) using data from 2020, which revealed that deputies with the Pierce County Sheriff's Department had disproportionately used force on the county's Black residents.

The study found that the sheriff's department was five times as likely to use force on Black residents as they were white residents. Despite the fact that Black people make up roughly 7% of the county's population, that demographic accounted for over 23% of incidents where deputies used force. Conversely, white residents — who make up 72% of the local population — experienced use of force just over 64% of the time.

"While I am talking about Pierce County and Tacoma as an example, we have no reason to believe that it is anything different across the state," Cushman opined.

The WCPA [led a rally in Olympia last week](#) to protest the two bills, admonishing lawmakers for considering "rollbacks" to what they say were necessary reforms.

"Last year, impacted families stood with allies to bring about change," said Katrina Johnson, the cousin of Charleena Lyles, who was shot and killed by Seattle police officers in 2017. "We got 14 pieces of legislation passed for police accountability. In 2022, it is not OK to go back on your promises that you made to impacted families and dial back what you did because political pressure is getting to you, because law enforcement came with a fear campaign."

"When we call the police, it is not the bills that were passed last year that's causing them to not show up," she added. "It's that they are having a temper tantrum because they don't want to change."

	<p>In a separate rally held in Spokane on Monday, the mother of David Novak — who was killed by police in 2019 after they mistakenly believed he was holding a gun — expressed how 2021’s police reforms were designed to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future.</p> <p>“We don’t want the bar lowered,” she said. “My son David Novak was shot and killed by a Spokane police officer in January of 2019. He was shot in the back as he attempted to walk through the front door of his home, and he was unarmed when he was shot. Never should have happened.”</p> <p>Both bills have been passed out of their respective committees, and are currently under consideration in the state Legislature.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Ukraine, Russia parallel military drills
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/09/russia-ukraine-putin-macron-nato/
GIST	<p>MOSCOW — As Russian warships sail toward the Black Sea and the Kremlin positions large numbers of troops and weapons for exercises in Moscow-friendly Belarus, Ukrainian troops are preparing for military drills of their own — using unmanned aircraft and antitank missiles supplied by Kyiv’s Western partners.</p> <p>The rival military exercises, starting Thursday, follow diplomatic activity on both sides of the Atlantic that some analysts fear is being used by Russian President Vladimir Putin as a delaying tactic while he gets his forces into position for a renewed invasion of Ukraine.</p> <p>It remains unclear whether the two days of whirlwind diplomacy — involving leaders from France, Germany, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and the United States — yielded any firm commitment to de-escalation. The Kremlin wants NATO to promise it will never let Ukraine join the military alliance and has called for the bloc to cease military activity in Eastern Europe.</p> <p>NATO diplomats, speaking on the condition of anonymity to talk frankly about internal strategic discussions, said they worried Putin’s demands were so expansive that there was little or no room for a compromise that all sides would find acceptable.</p> <p>Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, speaking alongside French President Emmanuel Macron in Kyiv on Tuesday, said it was the first time a French head of state had visited his country in 24 years, and he described the talks as “substantive and very productive.” He has projected an air of calm, denouncing what he and his advisers have characterized as a geopolitical fight between Russia and the West that has little to do with Ukraine itself.</p> <p>Moscow, which has massed some 100,000 troops near Ukraine and backs separatists in that country’s eastern territories, pledged to remove its forces from Belarus once the joint exercises are complete. Paris has said Putin agreed, after a Monday meeting with Macron, to not escalate the situation.</p> <p>In Washington, White House press secretary Jen Psaki hit back at suggestions the United States was out of the loop on the French president’s shuttle diplomacy. President Biden spoke with Macron twice over the past week, she said — including on Sunday, the day before Macron spoke with Putin — and the pair are expected to talk again soon.</p> <p>“There are a range of diplomatic conversations happening all the time,” she told reporters. “The United States is a key player in the vast majority of those negotiations.”</p> <p>Macron, who has long called for France to help lead a European foreign policy that is allied with but independent of Washington, has cast himself as a key interlocutor as the Kremlin demands to rework the continent’s security architecture.</p> <p>Congressional leaders in the United States also joined Biden in downplaying any ambiguity about Germany’s support for ending a major natural gas pipeline between Russia and Germany if Moscow attacks.</p>

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), who had dinner with Chancellor Olaf Scholz on Monday alongside other lawmakers, said the German leader had assured them behind closed doors that the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project would be abandoned — as promised by Biden — if Moscow again sends forces into Ukraine.

Scholz, who is from a center-left party that has Russia-friendly elements, has not made such a definitive commitment in public.

Sen. Robert Menendez (D-N.J.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, told Washington Post Live that he left the same dinner “convinced” that Berlin is in lockstep with Washington on potential actions in the event of a Russian attack on Ukraine. He also signaled there is strong support on both sides of U.S. politics for sanctions to severely punish Moscow if it launches a renewed invasion.

“There is no light, I think, between Democrats and Republicans on the desire and the need to push back on Vladimir Putin and to exact enormous consequences for any miscalculation of an invasion by Putin,” he said. “The only questions may be some of the specific tactics to do that.”

Lawmakers negotiating a bill that would allow for punitive measures against Russia are getting “closer and closer” to a deal, Senate Majority Leader Charles E. Schumer (D-N.Y.) said Tuesday. One remaining point of difference is whether to impose sanctions before or after any renewed Russian invasion, he said.

U.S. and European officials are eyeing the next 12 days with increasing concern, fearing that the Russian military exercises scheduled to start Thursday could provide cover for a sudden strike against Ukraine and that the Feb. 20 conclusion of the Winter Olympics in Beijing will clear a potential diplomatic barrier for Putin, who may fear upstaging Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Warships moving into the Black Sea, six large landing vessels, will take part in an exercise, the Russian navy said Tuesday. The military has in the past used that as a bluff before invasions.

In Ukraine, meanwhile, troops will begin drills Thursday using armed drones and antitank weapons provided by the United States and other NATO members. Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov has said the drills, scheduled to take place through Feb. 20, are a response to the Russian exercises near the border.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Ottawa protests beyond Canada borders
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/world/canada/canada-protests-bridge.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article
GIST	<p>As Ottawa residents woke up Tuesday to their 12th day of protesters occupying the core of Canada’s capital, the demonstrations continued to reverberate beyond Canada, with a new road blockade temporarily cutting off the country’s busiest link to the United States and copycat convoys spreading to New Zealand and Australia.</p> <p>The optics of Canada’s usually placid and orderly national capital overtaken by truckers and their supporters protesting coronavirus restrictions has shaken the country, and presented a difficult challenge to law enforcement and the government of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, which have failed to tame the protesters.</p> <p>The demonstrations have also captured the imagination of far right and anti-vaccine groups around the world, raising millions of dollars in online campaigns and inspiring protests in at least two countries — New Zealand and Australia — with talks of a third in the works in the United States.</p>

What began as loosely organized groups of truck drivers and protesters opposed to the mandatory vaccination of truckers crossing the border has tapped into wider national fatigue with pandemic restrictions, while emboldening Mr. Trudeau's critics.

Most of the protesters and the organizers are [clearly on the fringe](#), with some even wearing Nazi symbols and desecrating public monuments. But others who have arrived in Ottawa describe themselves as ordinary Canadians driven to take to the streets by desperation after nearly two years of pandemic restrictions.

Fears of economic fallout from the crisis were magnified on Monday after a new [protest blocked the road in Windsor, Ontario](#), from a bridge linking the city to Detroit. The Ambassador Bridge [is critical to the automobile industry](#), an important sector of the Canadian economy, which relies on a constant shuttling of parts and components and finished cars across the border to keep factories humming in Ontario and the Midwestern United States.

Most of the trucks in the Windsor protest were covered with flags and posters denouncing vaccine mandates and Mr. Trudeau. Heavy trucks and private vehicles blocked traffic from entering and exiting the bridge in Canada, closing it in both directions. An alternative bridge entrance allowed traffic to begin slowly moving again to the United States on Tuesday morning, according to the [Windsor police](#).

While the demonstration in Ottawa that started in January is far from over, an injunction issued Monday night barring horn honking and authorizing the police to arrest or remove those violating the order gave residents a reprieve overnight and meant that Ottawa's streets were quieter on Tuesday, despite the continued presence of more than 400 truckers still parked downtown.

Yet every day that the occupation continues, it seems to raise greater support among prominent far-right and anti-vaccine figures. The protest has drawn the attention of activists and influencers from numerous countries, including the United States, Australia and Germany, spreading hashtags, images and arguments across social media.

Thousands of people in cars, trucks, caravans and other vehicles crossed New Zealand and Australia this week to protest pandemic restrictions. The demonstrations — including a “Convoy to Canberra,” the Australian capital — are an echo of the so-called “Freedom Convoy” that has swarmed Ottawa.

Australia and New Zealand, which have some of the world's highest vaccination rates, prohibit unvaccinated people from going to cafes, bars and restaurants, and from visiting museums or other attractions. Those who are not vaccinated make up a small but vocal minority, with protests taking place in both countries throughout much of the year.

A convoy in New Zealand arrived in Wellington, the nation's capital, on Tuesday with thousands of vehicles, many flying New Zealand flags or bearing signs against mandates and in favor of “freedom.”

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern of New Zealand said she would not meet with the protesters. “We have a full day in Parliament today,” she told Radio New Zealand on Tuesday, adding, “That's what we'll be focused on today.”

There were few examples of public vandalism, though a convoy of demonstrators held up traffic at Canberra Airport to delay travelers. Protests also disrupted traffic, prompting buses to be rerouted.

In Australia, the convoy was made up not only of those opposed to vaccination mandates, but also of people who claim to be “sovereign citizens” and not subject to any laws, and members of some religious groups. Some accused lawmakers of being “pedophiles,” or said they would soon be arrested for treason. Others held flags in support of the conspiracy theory movement QAnon.

Some demonstrators in both countries claimed to be demanding greater rights for Indigenous groups. But in Australia, the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra disavowed the convoy. In New Zealand, many Maori tribes have encouraged their members to get vaccinated or organized vaccination drives for them.

In Canada, opinion polls have consistently shown strong support for public health measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus, which have mostly been imposed by provincial governments, many of them led by Conservatives.

But on Tuesday, Scott Moe, Saskatchewan's conservative premier who has previously voiced support for the protesters, announced that the province would end proof of vaccination and negative test policies on Feb. 14. Indoor mask requirements will continue until the end of the month. In Alberta, Premier Jason Kenney announced that the province's vaccine passport program would end as of Wednesday, and that mask mandates in schools would be lifted next week.

In Ottawa, Mr. Trudeau, who is already under fire by opposition Conservatives over his handling of the crisis, faced new dissent from within his own party ranks on Tuesday. Joël Lightbound, a Liberal member of Parliament from Quebec, spoke out against Mr. Trudeau's stewardship of the pandemic, saying that people worried about the government's policies had "legitimate concerns."

He said Mr. Trudeau shouldn't "demonize" people worried about pandemic restrictions.

Mr. Trudeau on Tuesday continued to stand by his commitment to vaccine mandates as the best means to fight the pandemic. And he has had his own message Monday night for the protesters in the national capital, whom he accused of undermining Canadian democracy: "It has to stop."

As the anti-vaccine demonstrations in Ottawa persist for a second week, Mr. Trudeau has steadfastly refused to negotiate with the protesters. Speaking to the House of Commons in Ottawa on Monday night, the prime minister said the protests were harassing Ottawa residents "in their own neighborhoods."

They are "trying to blockade our economy, our democracy and our fellow citizens' daily lives," he said.

The police have struggled to come up with measures to dismantle or even contain the occupation. Officers [were swarmed by protesters in Ottawa](#) on Monday, though none were badly injured, said Steve Bell, Ottawa's deputy police chief, in a news conference on Tuesday. The episode took place as the police were seizing canisters of fuel being delivered to protester encampments.

"There's many layers of complexity to dismantling this occupation," said Mr. Bell. "One is the sheer size of it. It covers many blocks in our city's downtown core."

The other is the size of the trucks — giant cabs, in some cases with their trailers still attached, parked on city streets. About a quarter of the trucks have children living in them "who could be at risk during police operation," said Mr. Bell.

Mr. Bell said police officials are exploring several legal avenues, and, in addition to more officers, have asked for additional lawyers from various agencies, as well as experts in insurance, licensing and registration of large trucks.

The occupation has forced many business owners in Ottawa to close their doors, losing tens of millions of dollars in the process. Those who have stayed open have seen little business, as few people can or are willing to access the city's downtown area.

Last month, in anticipation of indoor dining restarting in Ontario, Joe Thottungal bought an extra large order of meat and produce for his downtown Ottawa restaurant, Thali. But the day after most of his highly perishable inventory arrived, the trucker convoy rolled into the capital.

	<p>While the street in front of Mr. Thottungal's restaurant is truck-free, which allows him to remain open, most patrons have stayed away, out of fear of harassment from protesters or because roadblocks and road closures have made Thali inaccessible.</p> <p>On Monday night, seven Thali employees cooked and served a total of five customers. For Valentine's Day, he currently has six reservations, down from an expected 90 bookings.</p> <p>"This is a G7 capital and it's under siege — come on," he said during lunch on Tuesday, when only three customers were eating. "Can anybody in the government can tell us when this downtown will be normal? Nobody's saying, so how do you plan?"</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 L.A. County vax deadline public workers
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/08/world/covid-test-vaccine-cases#vaccine-mandate-la-county-sherriff
GIST	<p>The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed a motion on Tuesday that could lead to the termination of thousands of county employees who have not gotten vaccinated or received a medical or religious exemption.</p> <p>The motion, which passed by a vote of 4-0 with one abstention, would shift power away from department heads who may not be enforcing the county's existing vaccine mandate, and give it to the county's director of personnel.</p> <p>Supervisor Sheila Kuehl, author of the motion, said it was primarily aimed at the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department, whose 54 percent vaccination rate is the lowest of any of the county's 36 departments and whose leader has openly refused to enforce the county's vaccinate mandate.</p> <p>"It is ironic," Ms. Kuehl said, for the chief law enforcement officer "to say we're not going to obey the rules but we are going to arrest you if you don't obey all the other rules."</p> <p>The vote in Los Angeles County comes days ahead of a Friday vaccination deadline for police, firefighters and other public employees in New York City. Employees there who are not in compliance by Friday may be terminated.</p> <p>Ms. Kuehl in Los Angeles said the county was "weeks" away from firing anyone in the sheriff's department because employees there had not formally gone through the county's five-step process of warnings and suspensions that are required before termination.</p> <p>Still, Sheriff Alex Villanueva, who tried to rally public opposition to the motion, said on Tuesday it would lead to the termination of 4,000 unvaccinated deputies.</p> <p>"This is nothing more than another politically motivated stunt by the Board, which has no bearing on public health, but will definitely harm public safety," Mr. Villaneuva said, who called the vote a "suicide pact."</p> <p>Of the county's 100,000 employees, 83 percent were fully vaccinated as of Monday. Another roughly 15 percent have not been vaccinated, are seeking an exception to the mandate, or have not registered their vaccination status with the county, according to data provided by Los Angeles officials.</p> <p>As of Monday, more than 5,000 exemptions had been requested and nearly 2,400 were approved and about 2,500 were pending.</p> <p>Many of the county's departments have vaccination rates of 85 percent or higher, according to county data. County supervisors select the heads of each department, except the sheriff, who is elected publicly.</p>

	Ms. Kuehl said Covid-19 is “the greatest killer of law enforcement in the country and certainly in our sheriff’s department.” Therefore, she said Covid-19 was a threat to public safety, not vaccination mandates.
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HEADLINE	02/08 Denmark embraces ‘bring it on’ attitude
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/world/europe/denmark-covid-infections.html
GIST	<p>SJAELLANDS ODDE, Denmark — Aboard a ferry heading to Denmark’s second-largest city on Friday, Allan Hjorth stood out. He was one of just a few passengers to wear a mask, while hundreds of others left their faces uncovered, enjoying the end of Covid-19 restrictions announced a few days earlier.</p> <p>“The mere fact of wearing a mask makes people feel that something is wrong,” Mr. Hjorth said. He took his own off after a few seconds, and added, “And we, in Denmark, want to believe that we are going back to normal.”</p> <p>Nearly two years into the pandemic, “normal” looks like this in one of the world’s most prosperous nations: 5.8 million people live free of Covid restrictions, even though nearly 1 percent of them tested positive for the coronavirus in a single day last week. The country is reporting one of the world’s highest Covid-19 cases per capita, and hospitalizations have reached an all-time high.</p> <p>But the government declared that as of Feb. 1, it would no longer consider Covid a “socially critical disease” and dropped all restrictions, including a mask mandate in closed spaces and on public transportation.</p> <p>With the current surge of infections, it may seem counterintuitive to lift restrictions, but the country’s authorities say that deaths and hospitalizations are rising much more slowly than Covid cases, and that the number of patients in I.C.U.s is at its lowest level in months.</p> <p>Denmark’s health minister Magnus Heunicke said the country was not moving past the pandemic. But he said it was the right moment to benefit from Omicron’s seeming mildness and the country’s high vaccination rate — 81 percent of the entire population has been fully vaccinated, and 62 percent have received an additional shot.</p> <p>“We promised people that as soon as we could, we would open up,” Mr. Heunicke said in an interview. “But if there’s a new variant, if we learn that vaccines aren’t as effective, we will not hesitate to do what’s necessary. That’s the contract.”</p> <p>While many European nations have slowly walked away from coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions, Nordic countries are generally moving faster. Norway also dropped nearly all restrictions this month, including mandatory remote working, limits on serving alcohol and a ban on amateur sports. Sweden is expected to follow on Wednesday.</p> <p>“Everyone knows that there will be new waves of coronavirus infections next fall or in the winter,” said Espen Nakstad, assistant director of Norway’s Directorate of Health. “But it does not help to worry ahead.”</p> <p>The end of restrictions in Denmark, welcomed by the country’s top health experts and praised by the population, could help herald a future in which rich countries can afford “living with the virus,” as long as they have high vaccination rates, huge testing capacities and strong health data infrastructure.</p> <p>There is no guarantee that the next variant of concern might be as mild as Omicron for most, virologists say, warning that Denmark’s reopening could soon backfire.</p>

On Saturday, thousands flocked to Copenhagen's nightclubs, which reopened last week for the first time in nearly two months. Teenagers on their way to a motorcycle racing show gathering 7,000 people indoors in central Denmark said they risked little because they had Covid over the Christmas holidays.

And on the ferry to Aarhus, Mr. Hjorth, 70, said he would not wear a mask at the party he was headed to later in the evening.

In Denmark, the coronavirus is everywhere, yet streets, cafes and shops are full. Tens of thousands have to isolate because they tested positive, but employees are back in offices, and bars and restaurants are no longer required to close at 11 p.m. anymore or ask for proof of vaccination.

Troels Lillebaek, the director of the Copenhagen-based Statens Serum Institute, said the reopening would most likely lead to a peak of infections in mid-February, but that the authorities were mostly focusing on the number of hospitalizations, not cases.

Some have called the strategy risky. Stephen Griffin, an associate professor in virology at the University of Leeds in England, said that although the links between infections and severe outcomes were weakened in Denmark, deaths and I.C.U. capacity should not be the only factors to be considered.

"Just because there are enough beds for sick patients," Mr. Griffin said, "surely the aim must be to stop them being ill in the first place?"

Dr. Jens Lundgren, a professor of infectious diseases at the University of Copenhagen, said that to control the current surge of infections, Denmark would have had to impose enormous restrictions that would not have been proportionate to the health threat. "So we essentially let the Omicron epidemic roll."

Denmark was among the first countries in Europe to impose a lockdown in 2020, even as it was not among the most affected by the pandemic. It has moved in and out of restrictions, adopting a flexible approach praised by the population.

Although some controversies have affected the government's popularity, including the killing of 17 million minks because of fears of a mutation in the virus, trust in the authorities has remained high.

"We didn't even need to consider mandatory vaccinations," said Mr. Heunicke, the health minister. "It's a really good place to be in, I know that."

At a nightclub packed with hundreds of partygoers on Saturday, Sara Vang, 20, said many young people had embraced living with the virus. She said she had a high fever and at times struggled to breathe when she got infected earlier this year, even after receiving three doses of a vaccine. But she added, "Having Covid with bad symptoms feels part of what is now normal too, unfortunately."

Others, like Mr. Hjorth on the ferry, argued that the authorities could have kept mask mandates on public transportation, or that a slower reopening approach would have reassured them. "They have left it to us to get infected," said Ingrid Fensteen, an 82-year-old Copenhagen resident.

A record number of people have been hospitalized in recent weeks — 1,294 as of Monday. Denmark, which still has among the lowest Covid death rates in Europe, is now registering more Covid deaths than in the first weeks of the pandemic, and on par with figures registered in February last year.

But 31 people are in intensive care units, the lowest level since November. Mr. Lillebaek noted that those hospitalized with the coronavirus were being discharged quicker than during the previous waves of infections.

Michael Bang Petersen, a professor of political science at Aarhus University who conducts an interdisciplinary study on the public perception of the pandemic, said the Danes were perceiving the lowest level of threat since the beginning of the pandemic.

	<p>“Omicron has turned the epidemiological situation into a Rorschach test where you can see what you want to see in it,” he said.</p> <p>Mr. Heunicke said that large sections of the country’s population now had some immunity, and that the goal was to avoid any new lockdown by next winter. But he said that the current strategy may not be sustainable, as it relies on costly testing capacities that even Denmark may not be able to afford in the long term.</p> <p>Mr. Griffin, the professor of virology in Leeds, said Denmark had been in a better position than Britain or the United States to ease restrictions. Still, he said, “I hope that they don’t pay a price for not holding their nerve for a few more weeks.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/09 Europe goal: peace but not at any price
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/world/europe/ukraine-russia-macron-scholz-duda-putin-biden.html
GIST	<p>BERLIN — After two days of intense diplomacy on both sides of the Atlantic about the Ukraine crisis, the leaders of France, Germany and Poland said their overriding goal was the preservation of peace in Europe, but warned Russia of dire consequences if it launched further incursions into Ukraine.</p> <p>“We share one goal,” Olaf Scholz, the German chancellor, said on Tuesday after the leaders met in Berlin. “Preserving peace in Europe with diplomacy and clear messages and the common readiness to act jointly.”</p> <p>But, he made clear, peace could not come at any price. Speaking a day after meeting President Biden in Washington, Mr. Scholz continued: “A further violation of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine is unacceptable and would lead to far-reaching consequences for Russia, politically, economically and surely strategically, too.”</p> <p>It was one of the strongest statements yet on the crisis from Mr. Scholz. Germany has faced criticism for what has been perceived as a weak response to the huge Russian troop buildup at the Ukrainian border. But the meeting with Mr. Biden appeared to have stiffened the resolve of the chancellor, who took office just two months ago.</p> <p>He was flanked by Emmanuel Macron, the French president, and President Andrzej Duda of Poland, who called the situation “the most difficult since 1989.” Europe, he added, “has not seen these kinds of troop movements since World War II.”</p> <p>Poland’s sensitivities to Russian aggression are particularly acute after it spent the postwar decades trapped in the totalitarian Soviet imperium, and its sentiments are widely shared in Central and Eastern Europe.</p> <p>Mr. Putin’s massing of troops has caused the United States to pivot to Europe, rekindled a NATO alliance focused on its original mission, and threatened the painstakingly built security of the continent.</p> <p>Mr. Macron began the day in Moscow after a meeting on Monday with President Vladimir V. Putin, and he met President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine in Kyiv earlier Tuesday. “We want to continue the dialogue with Russia to avoid the risk of escalation and allow for de-escalation,” he said.</p> <p>Earlier, Mr. Macron said that he had secured from Russia a commitment to “no degradation or escalation” in Ukraine, opening new avenues of negotiation on the “collective security of the European space.”</p> <p>But the Kremlin gave a more guarded account. Dmitri S. Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, rejected reports that the two presidents had reached any agreement to de-escalate, and suggested that it was the United States, not France, that had standing to negotiate such a deal.</p>

In a 45-minute conversation with reporters on the plane from Moscow to Kyiv, Mr. Macron said he had never expected “for a second” that Mr. Putin would make some grand gesture, but he felt he had succeeded in his aim to “freeze the game.”

That may seem a paltry objective, but with an estimated 130,000 Russian troops stationed just outside Ukraine, any pause would be a negotiating opportunity.

If Mr. Putin has committed not to escalate, how long that might hold is unclear. The French president suggested at least a period of weeks. But in Moscow, Mr. Peskov sounded a more menacing note.

Despite “seeds of reason” in Mr. Macron’s approach, he said, “so far, we don’t see and feel the readiness of our Western counterparts to take our concerns into account.”

The crisis, he made clear, had not been defused, even as Mr. Macron’s top diplomatic adviser judged the chances of war as “low.”

After talks with Mr. Zelensky, Mr. Macron said both sides were open to pursuing peace in eastern Ukrainian provinces seized by Moscow-backed proxies.

Mr. Zelensky, standing beside the French president in Berlin, described Mr. Putin’s opening to talks as “good if it is serious and not a game.” He appeared skeptical.

Officials representing Russia, Ukraine, France and Germany will meet in Berlin on Thursday to discuss reviving the Minsk 2 agreement, which aimed to end fighting in the separatist provinces in eastern Ukraine. “This is the only road to a viable political solution,” Mr. Macron said of the agreement, which has been plagued by disputes over its meaning and proven inoperable since it was concluded in 2015.

This issue, however, only represents a small fraction of the problem, in that Mr. Putin has NATO in his sights as much as Ukraine’s breakaway provinces. More than a border dispute, the crisis poses the question of how European security will be assured for many years to come.

Sensing power shifting in his direction from a fractured United States, Mr. Putin wants to settle what he sees as accounts long due from Russia’s humiliation by the West after the end of the Cold War. NATO, through expansion, provided security and stability to countries oppressed in the Soviet system, but at the price of angering and alienating Russia in lasting ways.

Mr. Macron described Mr. Putin as locked in a “revisionist” logic. Officials close to the French leader portrayed a Russian president hardened and rigid — as if in a “bunker,” in the words of one.

The United States and its allies have rejected as non-starters Russian demands to cease NATO expansion into parts of Eastern Europe that Moscow considers to be in its sphere of influence. Mr. Putin also wants to push NATO back out of formerly Soviet-controlled countries.

Mr. Putin has massed troops on Ukraine’s eastern border but also to the north, in Belarus, where tens of thousands have gathered, nominally for military exercises that will conclude on Feb. 20. Their presence has raised fears that the Russian president might establish military bases in Belarus, keep troops there, and even deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of its neighbor. Kyiv is just 140 miles from the Belarus border.

Mr. Macron said he had secured assurances from Mr. Putin that the troops would be withdrawn immediately after the exercise. Mr. Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, said Mr. Putin did not give a date for the withdrawal, adding: “No one has ever said that Russian troops would stay in Belarus. That was never on the agenda.”

Analyzing Mr. Putin’s behavior before arriving in Berlin, Mr. Macron said the Russian leader “legitimizes what he does as reactive to NATO.” The result was that Mr. Putin, in his narrative, could always find a

pretext for aggression. “Every time we speak of the expansion of NATO, it’s met by Russian military action that reduces the sovereignty of Georgia or Ukraine,” Mr. Macron said.

Pursuing a favored theme of a new configuration for European security with a more powerful Europe at its heart, Mr. Macron said that “we have to think about the sovereignty and independence of these countries in a different form.” The independence of a country like Ukraine must be guaranteed, along with its sovereignty and the rule of law, but also its viability. This was a time, he argued, “for reimagining a way toward stability.”

In Berlin, Mr. Duda, the Polish president, had more immediate concerns than Europe’s future strategic architecture. “We’re all asking, what happens after? What will be result?” he said. “It’s up to us to safeguard international law and territorial integrity, also for countries that are not members of the European Union or NATO, but they are our allies.”

He added: “We have to show we take no step backward. We leave nobody behind.”

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HEADLINE	02/08 UCLA \$243M sexual abuse settlement
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/us/james-heaps-ucla-abuse-settlement.html
GIST	<p>The University of California has agreed to pay \$243 million to settle the claims of 203 women who alleged sexual misconduct by a gynecologist at the Los Angeles campus, the latest among several nine-figure payouts that universities have announced in recent years in response to sexual abuse allegations.</p> <p>The payout in the case of Dr. James Heaps, who was affiliated with the University of California, Los Angeles, in various roles from 1983 to 2018, comes on top of a \$73 million settlement made public in November 2020 to resolve a class-action suit that involved more than 5,000 people who had been patients of Dr. Heaps since the 1980s.</p> <p>About 600 women opted out of that class-action suit, and the new agreement, announced on Tuesday, settles the claims of 203 of them.</p> <p>The civil settlements are separate from the criminal case against Dr. Heaps, who faces 21 felony counts of sexual abuse during medical examinations, according to an indictment.</p> <p>The allegations against Dr. Heaps, which span two decades, include that he used a painful vaginal examination technique, inappropriately touched women during exams, unnecessarily touched a patient’s genital piercing, groped patients’ breasts during breast exams, and made inappropriate sexual comments to patients and employees, according to a May 2020 U.C.L.A. special committee report that reviewed accusations of sexual misconduct in clinical settings.</p> <p>Dr. Heaps, who was initially charged in June 2019, has pleaded not guilty to all charges. A lawyer for Dr. Heaps, Leonard B. Levine, said his client was not part of the civil settlement and does not approve of it.</p> <p>“He has adamantly denied engaging in any of the conduct he has been accused of,” Mr. Levine said. “He remains confident that if the charges are litigated in a court of law, he will be totally exonerated.”</p> <p>Lawyers for the plaintiffs said in a statement that they hope Tuesday’s settlement will “cause a reckoning” at the university and force leaders to place student welfare above the desire to protect the “Bruin brand,” referring to the U.C.L.A. mascot.</p> <p>“The sheer size of this settlement evidences the enormous harm that the depraved actions of James Heaps, which was enabled by U.C.L.A., caused our clients,” the statement said. “It also speaks to the culpability of U.C.L.A. in employing Heaps for 35 years and ignoring volumes of complaints and evidence of Heaps violating his role as a physician.”</p>

At a news conference, one of the lawyers, John Manly, of the law firm Manly, Stewart & Finaldi, said he hoped the size of the settlement would send a message to U.C.L.A. and leaders of other academic institutions that looking away from sexual misconduct could be costly.

"If you do this, if you don't stop systemic criminal conduct," he said, "be it by a doctor, the president of the university or anybody else at your school, you will be held accountable."

Standing by Mr. Manly on Tuesday was Kara Cagle, a woman who said she wrote a three-page letter to U.C.L.A. officials shortly after she was abused by Dr. Heaps during a medical examination. Ms. Cagle said she had been undergoing treatment for a rare form of breast cancer. The experience with Dr. Heaps, she said, left her "violated, embarrassed and humiliated."

"U.C.L.A.'s response was dismal," Ms. Cagle said. "No interview. No validation. Today, after eight long years, I received recognition of what happened to me. Although there is some consolation in that, my heart breaks for all the women who were not spared, all the women who suffered after me because U.C.L.A. refused to act."

In a statement, U.C.L.A. officials said they admired the courage of the plaintiffs in coming forward. They also said that University of California leadership has taken "substantial action" to address issues brought up in litigation, including stronger policies and procedures to prevent and respond to allegations of sexual misconduct by a clinician.

"The conduct alleged to have been committed by Heaps is reprehensible and contrary to the university's values," the statement said. "Our first and highest obligation will always be to the communities we serve, and we hope this settlement is one step toward providing healing and closure for the plaintiffs involved."

Mr. Levine, Dr. Heaps's lawyer, said he has filed a motion to dismiss the indictment because exculpatory evidence was not presented to the grand jury, including medical records and statements from chaperones who were present during the medical examinations. Mr. Levine said he was struck that the civil payout came before the criminal case was litigated.

University officials have "made a decision that they're better off settling the case than proceeding," Mr. Levine said. "Dr. Heaps is not going to settle a case when he believes he is innocent of the charges, and he has not admitted any wrongdoing in the civil cases either."

In recent years, the #MeToo movement has shined a spotlight on sexual harassment and abuse throughout American society. Universities have faced their own reckoning, as widespread abuses of students have been revealed in other high-profile cases. The payouts have often been costly.

In May 2018, Michigan State University agreed to a \$500 million settlement with 332 women and girls who said they were abused by Dr. Lawrence G. Nassar. The university's president described the settlement as a step "important for the healing process, not only for the survivors, but also for the university community."

The University of Southern California in March announced that it would pay more than \$1.1 billion to the former patients of a campus gynecologist accused of preying sexually on hundreds of patients in what university officials called "the end of a painful and ugly chapter in the history of our university."

The staggering sum — a combination of three sets of settlements with hundreds of alleged victims of the gynecologist, Dr. George Tyndall — set a record for collegiate sex abuse payouts, compensating a generation of young U.S.C. women.

And last month, less than a week after its board ousted its president for a relationship with a subordinate, the University of Michigan announced it would pay \$490 million to more than a thousand people who had accused a doctor who worked with football players and other students of sexual abuse.

	The doctor, Robert E. Anderson, who died in 2008, was accused by scores of students of molesting them during physical examinations, many of which were required to participate in athletic programs at Michigan.
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HEADLINE	02/08 Plans for trucker protest in US?
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/08/world/canada-trucker-protest?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News#plans-for-a-convoy-style-protest-in-the-us-gain-supporters-online
GIST	<p>Plans for a demonstration by truckers in the United States similar to the one in Canada appear to be gaining momentum, aided by online supporters.</p> <p>The route and timing of the demonstration, meant to protest pandemic restrictions in the United States, was set to be announced on Tuesday evening, said Brian Brase, a trucker who is organizing the American effort. According to messages posted on social media, the route may start in Sacramento, Calif., and end in Washington, D.C., but Mr. Brase declined to comment on details of the convoy until an official announcement was made.</p> <p>It is unclear how large any such convoy might be, should it come to pass. But anti-vaccine activists have started planning on popular forums on Facebook and Telegram, the messaging app.</p> <p>On Facebook, the hashtag #TruckersConvoy2022 has garnered almost 2 million interactions over the last two weeks, according to CrowdTangle, a data analytics tool owned by Meta, Facebook's parent company. Private Facebook groups dedicated to the convoy have also seen fast growth, with the main group collecting nearly 150,000 members since it started two weeks ago. A second group, dedicated to the efforts in the United States, has gained 50,000 members in the last week.</p> <p>Meta said it had removed several groups associated with the convoy for violating its rules, and was continuing to monitor the situation. One group had sent people to external sites to buy merchandise. Another group had violated Facebook's rules by sharing content tied to the banned QAnon conspiracy movement.</p> <p>Over the last two weeks, the activists have shifted from calling for supplies to be sent to Canada, to trying to mobilize and support a convoy of truckers in the United States, according to social media conversations viewed by The Times.</p> <p>Anti-vaccine activists have formed dozens of Telegram chat groups in each state, with many dedicated to specific counties. Members of those groups are trying to build local support and gather supplies for the truckers as they pass through.</p> <p>On Telegram, one California-based group began discussing how to stock food and other supplies for truckers participating. One person offered their property just south of Sacramento as a base, or launching point for the truckers to gather.</p> <p>"It's time for us to fight this war the enemy has declared," the person wrote, underneath a post that suggested that the trucker's convoy in the United States could disrupt everything from postal routes to the supply chain that delivers food to supermarkets.</p> <p>Wrote another member of the group: "Brace yourselves, let's make this big enough so every American feels it."</p> <p>Mr. Brase, a third-generation trucker who organizes an annual event called Ten Four D.C. that brings big rigs to Washington, said in an interview with The New York Times that the U.S. convoy was meant to</p>

	<p>show support for American health care workers, police and military personnel who are facing vaccine mandates.</p> <p>“The convoy is for everyone,” he said, “and to support the loved ones of truckers while we are on the road.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Tow truck operators decline to aid Ottawa
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/08/world/canada-trucker-protest?action=click&module=Well&pgtype=Homepage&section=World%20News#tow-truck-operators-are-turning-down-ottawas-calls-for-help
GIST	<p>There are hundreds of trucks clogging the downtown core of Ottawa and the political heart of Canada, but the city simply can't move them.</p> <p>The city's manager, Steve Kanellakos, said his office had asked all the heavy-duty towing companies contracted by the city to start moving protesters' trucks that have been parked illegally for more than a week now, snarling traffic and blocking off whole sections of the city.</p> <p>Every single one refused, he told a news conference on Monday afternoon.</p> <p>“We're all looking at the problem we have,” he said, adding that the city was reviewing its contracts with an eye to “what actions we can take to deal with this unprecedented situation.”</p> <p>The city's mayor called a state of emergency on Sunday, a week after the protesters had arrived, demanding an end to pandemic regulations and in some cases, for the prime minister to resign. At an emergency meeting on Monday, Ottawa City Council members hoped the emergency measure would arm the city with more power to do what neighbors' pleas and politicians' indignation had not — move the more than 400 illegally parked vehicles and trucks.</p> <p>But without the cooperation of tow truck operators, it might prove fruitless.</p> <p>“Most of the towing industry doesn't want to get involved,” said Joey Gagne, president of Abrams Towing. “It's a political issue,” he added. “We are not in the business of battling people. We are in the business of towing vehicles.”</p> <p>Mr. Gagne said he thought sending his staff into the city's so-called “red zone” to remove trucks was like throwing them into a “lion's mouth.” While it can take just minutes to impound a car, heavy trucks can take an hour because of their air brakes and heavy-duty transmissions — offering much more time for a crowd of angry onlookers to assemble, he said. Some of the trucks have been immobilized by their owners — with tires removed and brakes bled dry — according to the Ottawa Police's Deputy Chief Steve Bell.</p> <p>“I can't afford for my drivers to be hurt, injured or intimidated so they don't want to come back to work the next day,” said Mr. Gagne. “No amount of money would make it worth it.”</p> <p>And what happened to Randy May provides a clear warning.</p> <p>Mr. May, a local tow trucker, responded to a plea on Facebook from one of the convoy's organizers to help remove a crudely built plywood “cookhouse” that had been erected by protesters in a downtown park.</p> <p>A supporter of the “freedom convoy” who has been donating food and beer to the protesters, Mr. May went with his son and spent more than seven hours loading the structure onto his truck, before being escorted away by police.</p>

	<p>When photos and videos of the move were spread on social media, he was mischaracterized as an opponent of the protest. Since then, Mr. May has been deluged with hateful calls and death threats from as far as Ohio, Arizona and the western province of Alberta, he said.</p> <p>“I regret helping,” said Mr. May. “It’s going to sink my business.”</p> <p>Since local media published a story on him, Mr. May said, he has started receiving different angry calls — from people who oppose the occupation of their city and saw that he had been supporting it. “They tell me, ‘You get what you deserve,’” said Mr. May.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Alberta cedes; ends vaccine passports
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/8/alberta-caves-canada-trucker-protests-ends-vaccine/
GIST	<p>A Canadian province has conceded to nationwide demonstrations by the nation’s truckers and will abolish vaccine passports immediately and end most COVID-related restrictions by month’s end.</p> <p>Jason Kenney, the premier of Alberta, announced Tuesday evening that the passport requirement to enter businesses in the province will end at 11:59 p.m. local time and most other restrictions will be gone in three steps over the next three weeks.</p> <p>“Now is the time to begin learning to live with COVID,” Mr. Kenney said in a televised address. “These restrictions have led to terrible division.”</p> <p>“We cannot remain at a heightened state of emergency forever. We have to begin to heal,” he said.</p> <p>The Ottawa ‘Freedom Convoy,’ which has shut down Canada’s capital in the past weeks, has spread throughout the country and trucks have been blockading the southern border with the U.S., demanding an end to all COVID-19 mandates and restrictions.</p> <p>Earlier Tuesday, the Alberta premier also vowed to fight Canada’s federal government over its demand that all trucker drivers be vaccinated against COVID-19.</p> <p>“If the Canada-USA trucker vaccine mandate wasn’t bad enough, now Justin Trudeau wants to bring in a mandate for truckers going between provinces,” Mr. Kenney wrote on Twitter. “Alberta will fight this every step of the way – including in court, if we have to.”</p> <p>The leader of Alberta’s left-wing New Democratic Party accused Mr. Kenney of knuckling under to “criminals.”</p> <p>“The sight of an elected government being bent to the will of criminals should be of grave concern to everyone regardless of their political beliefs,” Rachel Notley said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 China fumes over US-Taiwan Patriot deal
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/8/china-fumes-us-approves-100-million-patriot-missil/
GIST	<p>The Biden administration has signed off on a \$100 million deal with Taiwan to boost its missile defense capabilities, sparking an angry reaction from the Chinese government Tuesday.</p> <p>The deal will provide five years’ worth of engineering support to the island intended to “sustain, maintain and improve the Patriot Air Defense System,” according to the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, which said it notified Congress of the sale on Monday.</p> <p>The sale will serve U.S. national economic and security interests by supporting Taiwan’s “continuing efforts to modernize its armed forces and to maintain a credible defense capability,” Defense Department officials said in a statement.</p>

	<p>“The proposed sale will improve the security of the recipient and assist in maintaining political stability, military balance and economic progress in the region,” officials said.</p> <p>China, which considers the island democracy part of its sovereign territory and has vowed one day to reclaim it, said Tuesday it would take “powerful countermeasures” after the Biden administration announced the deal, the first arms sale to Taiwan of 2022 and the second since Mr. Biden took office a year ago.</p> <p>According to Global Times, a newspaper controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, the deal violates the “One China” principle and harms Chinese sovereignty and security interests.</p> <p>“China firmly opposes and strongly condemns this,” Zhao Lijian, a spokesman for China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said during a Tuesday press briefing in Beijing.</p> <p>Taiwan’s foreign ministry said it welcomed the U.S. decision to support its Patriot missile program.</p> <p>“In the face of China’s continued military expansion and provocative actions, our country will maintain its national security with a solid defense and continue to deepen the close security partnership between Taiwan and the United States,” the ministry said in a statement.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Florists: Super Bowl on eve Valentine’s Day
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/8/florists-warn-higher-prices-super-bowl-conflict-val/
GIST	<p>Men traditionally have a week or two after the Super Bowl before they have to worry about flowers for Feb. 14. Not this year.</p> <p>Thanks to the newly expanded NFL regular season, the Super Bowl falls on the eve of Valentine’s Day. The nation’s florists are warning football fans who have only the Cincinnati Bengals and L.A. Rams on their radar this week not to wait until after the big game on Sunday.</p> <p>“Most guys are not thinking about Valentine’s Day this year because of the Super Bowl,” said Chris Drummond, chair of the Alexandria, Virginia-based Society of American Florists.</p> <p>Rising prices, supply chain issues and an expected last-minute run on roses will likely limit options for buyers who wait until Monday morning.</p> <p>Retail prices for roses, tulips and hydrangeas have gone up about 20% nationally since the COVID-19 pandemic started in March 2020, the society said.</p> <p>“Men are typically impulse buyers, not planners. They will go to work Monday, look at their calendars and realize it’s time to buy flowers,” Mr. Drummond said.</p> <p>Feb. 13 is the latest the Super Bowl has ever been played, after the NFL expanded its regular season to 17 games.</p> <p>The first Super Bowl was held on Jan. 15, 1967. The championship game was moved to late January in the 1980s and was played in January until 2002, after the 9/11 terrorist attacks pushed back the NFL schedule one week. It has been scheduled for February since 2004.</p> <p>Mr. Drummond said many florists who have ordered and started arranging Valentine’s Day flowers will hold back a small inventory of roses for men who forget until the holiday is upon them.</p> <p>Most order Valentine’s Day flowers for delivery instead of buying them in a store.</p>

Mr. Drummond, who owns Penny's by Plaza Flowers in Norristown, Pennsylvania, is offering a \$10 discount to persuade customers to order flowers for delivery on Friday.

"My advice is to send the flowers early and make the holiday into a whole weekend," he said. "Some florists who run out of flowers will just shut their phones off and close the delivery option on their websites on Feb. 13 and 14."

Other florists' incentives to order early include a free box of chocolates and three extra roses in a dozen. They don't want the Monday rush to overwhelm their delivery trucks.

Alejandro Bethlen, CEO of The Bouqs online flower retailer, said he has launched a marketing campaign for early orders and is looking at expanded delivery options for Monday.

"Valentine's Day is notoriously a last-minute holiday, but this year it lands as the day after the Super Bowl," Mr. Bethlen said. "We are using targeted marketing, promotions and on-site messaging to push people to shop early so they can enjoy the game without having to worry about flowers the next day."

Most florists have ordered their inventory ahead of time, but supply chain problems have driven up prices and the limited number of delivery vans will make it harder for them to ship flowers on the holiday.

"We started ordering early in December, and we've had to raise prices 30% to 40% because COVID has raised the cost of everything," said Oscar Andrade, owner of Petals to the Metal Florist in Kensington, Maryland. "Roses used to cost 78 cents wholesale, and now they're a dollar and forty cents, so it's intense."

The business has 30 drivers and about 20,000 red roses, he said.

"I hope I have enough," he said. "It's been super hard to keep enough employees because they're either sick or afraid of catching COVID."

Supply chain issues have resulted in shortages of fertilizer and parts for cargo planes in South America, which supplies the majority of flowers to U.S. retailers, as well as increased costs for containers and flower food.

"Many if not most of the flowers that Americans associate with festive occasions are not grown in the United States," said Peter C. Earle, an economist at the libertarian American Institute for Economic Research in Massachusetts. "They come from places as diverse as Kenya, the Netherlands, Thailand and Ecuador, all of which involve long, complicated supply chains."

In the U.S., a worker shortage in retail shops and among truckers has accompanied increased labor costs and a shortage of parts for the refrigerated tractor-trailers needed to haul flowers. Costs are also up for the floral preservatives and conditioners that florists use to make the blooms last longer, adding to the cost of roses in local shops.

That means lovers who wait to place orders on Super Bowl Sunday or on Valentine's Day will have trouble getting red roses, white roses, tulips and hydrangeas.

Joel Griffith, a research fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation, said government vaccine mandates and "generous unemployment benefits" have limited the floral industry's workforce and output.

"Draconian COVID-19 restrictions resulted in fewer flowers being planted during the pandemic, resulting in supply shrinking for this season," Mr. Griffith said. "Meanwhile, demand is surging as people resume social activities — such as weddings, birthday parties and even funerals — that utilize floral arrangements."

	<p>John D. Rosen, a consumer products expert who teaches economics at the University of New Haven, said flowers will be only one side of a double-whammy that hits Valentine's Day shoppers. Hershey has announced price increases for its chocolates.</p> <p>"Shop early, get your Valentine's Day presents stocked up and ready, and be a hero on the big day when you are the only one who delivers candy to their loved one," Mr. Rosen said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 IHME researcher: pandemic end mid-March
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/newsletters-deprecated/leading-local-infectious-expert-sees-hope-in-recent-covid-case-trends
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — A local infectious diseases expert said Tuesday that new and emerging trends seem to indicate that the end of the COVID pandemic could come as soon as mid-March if the trajectory of current indicators remain the same.</p> <p>"We need to be realistic," said Dr. Ali Mokdad, a top researcher at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington. "We need to know what we are facing. Not to live in fear anymore."</p> <p>Mokdad said the hospitalization numbers from COVID-19 are pointing in the right direction.</p> <p>"In my opinion, come March the United States will be like European countries," Mokdad said. "No more mask mandates. We will not ask people to go and get the vaccine. We will not ask somebody arriving at (the) Seattle airport to have a PCR test before landing in Seattle. We don't do this for the flu and we should move on."</p> <p>However, he cautions that the state's residents need to continue wearing face masks and getting vaccinations until we reach that point and even then we need to keep an eye out for any kind of new variant.</p> <p>"We should be very careful," he said. "Improve our surveillance systems. Make sure we are able to detect a surge or a rise in cases any time because we need to know as soon as possible if we have something different circulating in our community and cases starting to go up."</p> <p>But as of right now he believes we're at the beginning of the end. "I'm the guy who told you all time, 'masks, testing' everything. But, we've reached a level in my opinion we're in an endemic phase and we have to deal with COVID-19 as such. COVID-19 is going to be here. It's going to be like any flu. Every year you and I will get a COVID-19 shot before the season. It's seasonal. We're going to have a bad COVID season. But it's endemic. We need to move on."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Frustration over Capitol Hill homeless camp
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/project-seattle/neighbors-in-capitol-hill-worried-about-troublesome-homeless-camp-at-seven-hills-park
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Frustrated neighbors in Capitol Hill said the city is neglecting Seven Hills Park, now over run by a troublesome homeless encampment.</p> <p>They are worried about the lingering crime and new tents popping up at this encampment near 16th Avenue and East Howell Street.</p> <p>For nearly a year, neighbors said they have been begging the city to do something about this and are now losing patience as they wait for the new mayor to follow through on his promises.</p>

One frustrated home owner only wants to go by “Kamran,” said multiple people have been recorded on camera trespassing at the Sanctuary Townhomes, urinating on the building, or peering through the windows.

“There are a lot of people who use my front door and my front porch for drug dealing,” Kamran said. He says all these issues during the past few months including an increase in crime, are coming from the homeless encampment next door. It’s an area surrounded by multiple homes, and just a block away from Kaiser Permanente Hospital.

“It’s like groundhog day,” said neighbor Nancy Douglas. “They go from one place to the next. Nothing gets fixed.”

Kamran said he’s called 9-11 numerous times, but by the time officers arrive it’s too late. And he said his council member Kshama Sawant is never available to help.

We reached out to her as well. So far, no comment.

We spoke to mayor Bruce Harrell on the phone Tuesday. He does not want to make excuses for the challenging homeless crisis he inherited and the time line for laying out his response plan is still unclear. But Harrell says he is “continuing to build and improve city systems to respond to the homelessness crisis with urgency and action.”

“It would be very helpful if he comes and sees for himself what we are dealing with,” Kamran said.

Seattle Parks and Recreation said outreach will finally start here this week, but the agency would not give a timeline on when this will all be cleared out. Until then, other neighbors are afraid Seven Hills, will turn into the next Ballard Commons Park.

For more than a year, KOMO has reported extensively on problems associated with a sprawling encampment at "that" park - from fires to violent crime, drug use, and trash. The city finally cleared out the camp two months ago and fenced off the perimeter of Ballard Commons Park to keep people out during the cleanup, and repairs.

At the time the parks department said the park would be closed for six months up to a year. A spokesperson told us Tuesday they should have a better idea on a timeline for reopening in the next couple of months.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Spokane County: first flu-related death
SOURCE	https://www.krem.com/article/news/health/spokane-county-first-flu-death/293-3b314013-bbf7-4820-b006-9054aeb24c05
GIST	<p>SPOKANE COUNTY, Wash. — The first flu-related death has been reported in Spokane County.</p> <p>According to the Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD), although flu activity has been low in the region, the virus claimed the life of a woman in her 80s with “underlying health conditions.”</p> <p>"Unfortunately, this is an example of how serious flu can be," said Dr. Francisco Velázquez, Spokane County health officer. “Your best chance at protecting yourself and others is to get the flu vaccine.”</p> <p>According to a press release from SRHD, people over the ages of 65, young children, pregnant women, American Indian/Alaska Natives and those with certain health conditions are at greater risk for flu-related complications.</p> <p>Three other flu-related deaths occurred in Washington this season. At this time last season, there were no hospitalizations or deaths reported in Spokane County, but there were three flu deaths statewide.</p>

	<p>SRHD reported that people who have the flu often experience the following symptoms:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fever or chills • Cough • Sore Throat • Runny or stuffy nose • Muscle or body aches • Headaches • Extreme fatigue <p>The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends everyone six months of age and older to get immunized against the flu. According to SRHD, the vaccine promotes antibody protection within two weeks.</p> <p>Spokane County residents can find flu shots at numerous locations in the area, including healthcare provider offices, local pharmacies and grocery stores.</p> <p>“Since some vaccines are intended for certain groups, talk to your provider or pharmacist about the vaccine that is best for you,” Dr. Velázquez said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Controversy over Miss Teen WA USA video
SOURCE	https://www.q13fox.com/news/miss-teen-washington-usa-responds-to-resurfaced-video-of-her-using-racial-slur
GIST	<p>Controversy is brewing around the newly crowned Miss Washington Teen USA, Kate Dixon, after a video resurfaced of the teen shortly after she won the competition. In the video, she is seen on camera and heard using a racial slur, and lip-syncing about drug use and bullying.</p> <p>A tipster sent FOX 13 News a video which we’ve blurred other teens and bleeped any inappropriate language.</p> <p>We reached out to Kate, and she tells FOX 13 that three years ago, she was in a car with upperclassmen, and she was peer pressured into saying the N-word. She says she did not know she was being recorded when she said it.</p> <p>Kate says a week later, it was posted to social media, and it spread from there.</p> <p>"They coerced me into saying a racial slur. I told them ‘no, I don’t want to say that,’” said Kate. "I know that it’s not appropriate. And they told me ‘you have a free pass just this one time, it would be funny.’ So I decided, after much persuasion, I said the word that they wanted me to say and without my knowledge I was recorded."</p> <p>Kate and her mother say she publicly apologized at school and numerous times after that, but she says she was bullied and received death threats. She says she has since transferred to a different school, but says the video resurfaces every time she achieves something.</p> <p>She told FOX 13 she wanted to address this head-on, hoping to use this as part of her platform of promoting positivity.</p> <p>"Honestly having gone through this experience, I feel like you don’t realize the true meaning of how something can affect you that’s posted online until you’re caught in a situation like mine. Where something negative from your past, because it being on social media, comes to resurface again," Kate said. "I think most of all that if they feel offended by this that I am very deeply sorry, that I have learned my lesson and I have not used that word to this day. I have not used that word."</p>

FOX 13 also spoke with the executive producer of Pageants Northwest, an agency that oversees four states in the Miss USA and Miss Teen USA organizations. Pageants Northwest says it became aware of the video in October 2020.

Kate and her family spoke with them about the video before she began competing for the teen title three years ago. After that discussion, they weighed the options of accepting Kate's application to become a contestant.

In the end, they allowed her to compete over the past few years, saying part of the pageant's mission is empowering people to quote: "be the best versions of themselves."

"What she did was absolutely unacceptable. But as I shared with you—if our organization is designed to be the best version of yourself and if somebody admits fault to it, has apologized and says 'hey, I want to work on being the best version of myself, and that's why I want to be part of your community,' how do you turn your back away?" said Maureen Francisco.

This push for positivity is a new emphasis from Kate's previously stated platform as a pageant contestant where she stated her support for Lutheran Ministries, Friends of Youth, and a camp for estranged siblings.

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HEADLINE	02/08 New York rolls back mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/08/world/covid-test-vaccine-cases#us-mask-mandates
GIST	<p>Gov. Kathy Hochul will drop New York's stringent indoor mask mandate on Wednesday, ending a requirement that businesses ask customers for proof of full vaccination or require mask-wearing at all times, and marking a turning point in the state's coronavirus response, according to three people briefed on her decision.</p> <p>The decision will eliminate a rule that prompted legal and interpersonal clashes over mask wearing, especially in conservative parts of New York. It was set to expire on Thursday and would have required renewing.</p> <p>Ms. Hochul is expected to let the mask mandate lapse just as a crushing winter surge in coronavirus cases is finally receding. But it was as yet unclear whether the governor would renew or drop a separate mask mandate in New York schools that expires in two weeks.</p> <p>Still, the easing of New York's pandemic restrictions on businesses comes as Democratic-led states from New Jersey to California have announced similar moves this week, in a loosely coordinated effort that is the result of months of public-health planning, back-channel discussions and political focus groups that began in the weeks after the November election.</p> <p>The moves highlight how even local officials who installed sweeping safety measures early in the pandemic are now preparing to live permanently with the virus.</p> <p>"This is not a declaration of victory as much as an acknowledgment that we can responsibly live with this thing," Gov. Philip D. Murphy of New Jersey, a Democrat who imposed some of the nation's toughest pandemic-related mandates, said on Monday. Under Mr. Murphy's new policy, which will take effect the second week of March, students and school employees in the state will no longer be required to wear masks.</p> <p>Shortly after the New Jersey announcement on Monday, the Democratic leaders in California, Connecticut, Delaware and Oregon separately said they would also end some mask mandates.</p> <p>Connecticut will permit students and staff members to stop wearing masks in schools by no later than Feb. 28; Delaware will end mask mandates in schools by March 31. Oregon and California announced the end to mask mandates at indoor public spaces.</p>

Gov. Gavin Newsom of California [wrote on Twitter](#) on Monday that cases had dropped, hospitalizations had stabilized, and the state's indoor mask mandate for vaccinated people would expire on Feb. 15.

Gov. Kate Brown of Oregon [on Twitter said](#) on Monday that the state would "lift mask requirements no later than March 31."

The moves to eliminate mask mandates in these states come as the number of reported cases has dipped to its lowest level since the highly contagious Omicron variant touched off a wave of cases in December.

As of Tuesday, the daily average of new cases in the United States dropped to around 240,000, the lowest that figure has been since late December, according to [a Times database](#).

Though the daily average of hospitalizations has steadily declined since its peak on Jan. 20, the daily average of deaths linked to the virus has hovered at nearly 2,600 since Jan. 27.

The rollbacks also highlight the patchwork nature of health protocols that have yet to be synchronized from county to county within many states, let alone between states, since the pandemic began in early 2020.

New Mexico and Illinois have statewide mask mandates for schools and many indoor settings, according to the Times's [mandate tracking site](#).

Idaho, Louisiana and Mississippi recommend indoor mask-wearing, and Republican-led states like Texas and Florida have banned mandates. Whether to mandate mask-wearing in schools is up to local officials in most states.

The mask rollbacks announced on Monday appear to undercut messaging coming from federal officials. Asked on Monday about the lifting of mask mandates in New Jersey, Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, pointed to federal guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that says [masks can reduce transmission of coronavirus](#).

"Our responsibility as the federal government is to rely on the data and the science that is being analyzed by our public health experts," Ms. Psaki said at a news conference.

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HEADLINE	02/08 World surpasses 400M known Covid cases
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/08/world/covid-test-vaccine-cases#400-million-covid-cases
GIST	<p>The world surpassed 400 million known coronavirus cases on Tuesday, according to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University, just one month after reaching 300 million. It is a staggering increase driven by the highly transmissible Omicron variant as governments and individuals worldwide wrestle with how to confront the next stage of the pandemic.</p> <p>It took more than a year for the world to reach 100 million confirmed infections: The first cases were identified in late 2019, and the 100 millionth in January 2021. It took only seven months to double that number, and now six months to double it again. Daily case counts have begun to decline, but there have been an average of more than 2.7 million infections reported every day.</p> <p>The actual number of cases is undoubtedly higher, and probably drastically so. Many at-home rapid test results are never officially reported, and not all infected people get tested because they may lack access, have no symptoms or choose not to.</p> <p>As the virus has mutated, almost five billion people have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, and research indicates that vaccines still offer protection against the worst outcomes. The current, dominant form of the virus — Omicron — is less likely to lead to hospitalization or death, so case counts</p>

on their own have become less useful as a metric, at least in places with higher rates of vaccination or prior infection. In New York City, for example, [cases peaked 541 percent higher this winter than last](#), but deaths rose much less, peaking 44 percent higher than last winter.

But [scientists have cautioned that protection](#) against infection [may wane over time](#), and [future variants may be better able to sidestep our defenses](#).

Still, many governments have loosened restrictions as Omicron-fueled surges in many places have declined. Australia will soon [reopen its borders](#) to vaccinated visitors. Sweden is lifting [most of its pandemic regulations](#), following in the footsteps of [Denmark and Norway](#). Just this week, the governors of [California](#), Connecticut, Delaware, [New Jersey](#) and Oregon [said they would end statewide indoor mask mandates](#), some of which applied to schools and others to public places.

Dr. Céline Gounder, an infectious disease expert and epidemiologist at Kaiser Health News, said in an interview on Tuesday that whether such relaxations were appropriate or premature depended on local context, including vaccination rates, number of infections, and hospitalization rates relative to hospital capacity.

Within the United States, “if there’s anywhere that’s in a position to dial back on mitigation measures, it would be parts of the Northeast,” Dr. Gounder said. But she added that she was surprised at the decision to do so statewide in California, where circumstances vary greatly at the local level.

The moves reflect the profound exhaustion people are experiencing two years into the pandemic, and an understanding that the coronavirus is here to stay in some form. But [what that looks like remains unclear](#).

“The virus will become endemic” is a truth broadly accepted by people [who disagree on what the word even means](#).

[Endemicity can](#), but does not necessarily, mean a mild threat: The common cold is endemic, but so is malaria in many parts of the world. The coronavirus will probably end up posing a greater or lesser threat in different places, depending on vaccination rates and other factors. New variants could further complicate the picture, especially with billions of people around the world still unvaccinated.

[Only 11 percent](#) of people in low-income countries have received a dose of a coronavirus vaccine, compared with 78 percent in high- and upper-middle-income countries, according to the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford. Africa [has the slowest vaccination rate of any continent](#), with just 15.4 percent of the population receiving at least one dose. Some people with disabilities, chronic illnesses or weakened immune systems [remain vulnerable](#) despite vaccinations.

And the coronavirus continues to take a devastating toll, [including in the United States](#), where the virus has killed at far higher rates than in other wealthy nations.

[More than 5.7 million people worldwide](#) have died of the virus, including [more than 900,000 in the United States alone](#). On average, the United States is reporting 2,598 new deaths a day, the equivalent of a disaster worse than Pearl Harbor every day. Globally, 10,900 people a day are dying from Covid-19.

“We’re concerned that a narrative has taken hold in some countries that because of vaccines, and because of Omicron’s high transmissibility and lower severity, preventing transmission is no longer possible and no longer necessary,” Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the director general of the World Health Organization, [said last week](#). “Nothing could be further from the truth.”

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HEADLINE	02/08 Italy drops outdoor mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/08/world/covid-test-vaccine-cases#italy-outdoor-mask-mandate

GIST	<p>Italy will no longer require masks to be worn everywhere outdoors, the government said on Tuesday, adding to a growing list of coronavirus restrictions that European countries have relaxed recently as they wrestle with what the next stage of the pandemic could look like.</p> <p>“A new phase is opening up,” Italy’s health minister, Roberto Speranza, said on Italian television on Monday.</p> <p>Italy will continue to require mask-wearing in public indoor settings, and Mr. Speranza said that masks remained an important tool to fight against the virus. Italians will still be required to carry a mask with them, and to put it on outdoors if a crowd forms.</p> <p>The new policy will go into effect on Friday.</p> <p>It comes at a time when reports of new coronavirus cases have started to decline in Italy after a surge caused by the now-dominant Omicron variant, which is highly contagious but less often lethal than previous versions of the virus. About 77 percent of Italians are fully vaccinated, according to the Our World in Data project at the University of Oxford.</p> <p>Italy’s move follows similar announcements last Friday in Spain, where 81 percent of residents are fully vaccinated, and in France last week, where 77 percent are fully vaccinated. Like Italy, those countries still require masks in indoor public spaces.</p> <p>“The signals we have on the pandemic front are encouraging” Gabriel Attal, France’s government spokesman, told French reporters on Friday. “They allow us to be optimistic.”</p> <p>Italy’s outdoor mask mandate was most recently imposed in December, when the virus was surging across the country. Greece also has an outdoor mask mandate still in place.</p> <p>The surge has not completely subsided; Italy is still averaging nearly 100,000 new cases a day, and it reported 415 more Covid-related deaths on Tuesday, according to government figures. But the new-case average has fallen significantly in the last two weeks, according to the Center for Systems Science and Engineering at Johns Hopkins University.</p> <p>Mr. Speranza attributed the improvement to the country’s vaccination campaign. In Italy, vaccination is mandatory for anyone over 50, as well as all doctors and teachers, and proof of vaccination must be shown to take part in most leisure activities, including dining and drinking at restaurants and bars.</p> <p>Andrea Costa, a health ministry official, told the Italian news agency ANSA on Monday that with the vaccination campaign going well, “we must give a positive signal to the citizens.”</p> <p>Some other countries are lifting restrictions much faster, saying it was time to learn to live with the virus.</p> <p>Last week, Denmark dropped all its coronavirus restrictions, including an indoor mask mandate, even though new cases and hospitalizations there are rising. The country’s health minister, Magnus Heunicke, said that since so much of the population is vaccinated (81 percent is fully vaccinated) and Omicron tends to cause less serious disease, allowing Danes to go back to unrestricted living was “safe and the right thing to do now.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Public resolve wanes to combat pandemic
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/us/politics/covid-restrictions-americans.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article
GIST	A wave of polls taken as the Omicron variant crested across much of the United States shows new signs that the public’s resolve to combat the coronavirus pandemic is waning.

The surveys depict an increasingly frustrated and pessimistic nation that is as worried by the specter of an endless pandemic as it is fearful of the disease. While a majority of voters remain concerned about the coronavirus, the balance of recent polling suggests that the desire to return to normalcy has approached or even overtaken alarm about the virus itself.

A recent [Yahoo News/YouGov](#) survey found that 46 percent of respondents thought Americans should “learn to live with” the pandemic “and get back to normal,” while just 43 percent thought “we need to do more to vaccinate, wear masks and test.”

A Republican firm, Echelon Insights, had similar [findings](#), reporting that 55 percent of voters thought Covid-19 should be “treated as an endemic disease that will never fully go away,” like the flu, while 38 percent said it should be “treated as a public health emergency.”

The results are especially striking at a time when [coronavirus cases](#), [hospitalizations](#) and even [deaths](#) are near record highs. Indeed, the same polls showed that the public’s concern about the virus increased during the Omicron wave. But in a telling indication of the public’s attitudes toward the pandemic, greater worry about the virus has not translated to greater support for measures to stop its spread.

Instead, fears of the virus apparently have been outweighed by mounting frustration with the inconveniences of a pandemic that has stretched into its second year. Three-quarters of adults described themselves as tired or frustrated with the pandemic in a recent [Kaiser Family Foundation survey](#).

Fully 70 percent of Americans agreed with the statement that “it’s time we accept Covid is here to stay and we just need to get on with our lives” in a [recent poll](#) by Monmouth University. That survey found that support for vaccine mandates has dropped to just 43 percent from 53 percent in September, while support for masking and social distancing guidelines dropped to 52 percent from 63 percent over the same period.

The findings come at a possible turning point in the pandemic, as [several Democratic governors](#) announced intentions to ease some mask mandates over the next month. The growing frustration with pandemic restrictions may help explain some of those early announcements — even as cases reach record levels.

The polls create a delicate challenge for the Biden administration, which [never regained its political standing](#) since the rise of the Delta variant dashed last summer’s hopes of a return to normalcy. The growing unease with the pandemic seems to have added to the president’s political woes, and may help explain why the public disapproves of Mr. Biden’s handling of the coronavirus for the first time.

But a majority of Democratic-leaning voters continue to support a more vigorous response to the pandemic, potentially limiting how quickly the administration can readjust to public opinion. Many Americans harbor serious concerns about the health risks presented by the virus; the Biden administration may not find it easy to bring them along, at least as long as cases and deaths remain at elevated levels.

And while a majority of voters may be itching for a return to normalcy, the public does not necessarily want an immediate end to pandemic-related measures. While a new Axios/Ipsos poll [found](#) that a majority of voters wanted to “move toward opening up,” less than half of those respondents — or just 21 percent of all Americans — said they supported going back to life as usual with “no coronavirus mandates or requirements.”

With cases now declining across most of the country, it is possible that the public’s tolerance for virus restrictions may wane along with the virus in the weeks ahead.

But for now, the public is not optimistic about Mr. Biden or anyone bringing the pandemic to an end. Even though many of the most onerous pandemic restrictions, like shutdowns or remote schooling for children, have largely come to an end, only 18 percent of Americans say their lives have returned to normal,

according to another Axios/Ipsos poll. In the same survey, just 13 percent of people expected to get back to their normal pre-Covid lives within the next six months, down from 36 percent in June.

Only 15 percent of adults believed that the disruptions to travel, school and work would end this year, according to Gallup. And 28 percent of those polled by Monmouth believed that the country would never return to normal again, up from 9 percent a year earlier.

At the same time, the public's fears of the virus have gradually abated. Overall, 38 percent said they were very concerned about someone they know becoming seriously ill, according to the Monmouth poll. That's up slightly from 30 percent in December, before the Omicron variant spread, but beneath the 45 percent who said the same at the peak of the Delta surge in September, or the 60 percent who said they were very concerned before the vaccination campaign last spring.

The polls show that the public is, at best, divided on whether the virus itself is the most significant problem facing the nation. Many surveys show that the economy and inflation are now rated as the most important issue, and only about one-third of Americans say the pandemic is the most serious challenge.

The long-term decline in concern about the coronavirus likely relates to rising vaccination rates, but it may also reflect the diminished severity of the Omicron variant. Overall, 69 percent of adults said they were "less worried" about how Omicron will affect them personally than in prior waves of variants, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation poll. Instead, a majority of Americans said they were "more worried" about the effect of Omicron on the economy and local hospitals.

Apparently, those societal concerns have not been enough to spur individuals to take action to check the pandemic. The Kaiser poll found that a majority of adults said they were no likelier to wear a mask, avoid large gatherings, get a vaccine or a booster shot as a result of Omicron.

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HEADLINE	02/08 England: years to clear medical backlog
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/08/world/covid-test-vaccine-cases#england-nhs
GIST	<p>England has a huge backlog of elective medical procedures, worsened by the coronavirus pandemic, that will take years to clear, Sajid Javid, Britain's health secretary, told lawmakers on Tuesday as he announced a plan to address the problem.</p> <p>When coronavirus cases surged in England during the pandemic, hospitals in the National Health Service gave priority to patients who were critically ill with Covid-19, and suspended nonemergency procedures. Many health workers caught the virus themselves, depleting staff. Months of strain on the health service sent the backlog to crisis levels.</p> <p>Mr. Javid warned that the backlog would continue to grow, probably until March 2024, before efforts to address it could turn the tide.</p> <p>Government figures showed that before the pandemic began, there were about 1,600 people in England who had been waiting more than a year for "planned care," meaning nonemergency and elective procedures. Now, the figure is over 300,000.</p> <p>Though the procedures are classified as nonemergency, they often are vital, and include operations like organ transplants, tumor removals and critical heart surgery.</p> <p>All told, some six million people in England are waiting for planned medical procedures, up from 4.4 million before the pandemic, Mr. Javid told Parliament on Tuesday. Many more are likely to join the queue because they did not see their doctors during the pandemic and missed out on preventive care and regular screenings, Mr. Javid said.</p>

	<p>The plan to address the backlog calls for more spending on recruiting and training health workers, on diagnostic testing and on efforts to make sure that the most time-sensitive procedures get priority.</p> <p>“Sadly, as a result of focusing on urgent care, the N.H.S. couldn’t deal with nonurgent care as much as anyone would have liked,” Mr. Javid told lawmakers.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Disenrolled Nooksack face eviction
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/community/disenrolled-nooksack-tribal-members-face-eviction/281-965dc408-6e18-4250-8101-1fc23b3866e8
GIST	<p>BELLINGHAM, Wash. — Some 30 minutes northeast of Bellingham in a neighborhood cut out of dense forest, you'll find a group of disenrolled Nooksack Tribe members fighting with all they have to keep their namesake and their homes.</p> <p>“That’s where we’re all going to have to stand up and we’re not moving. I don’t know what we have to do ... it’s going to get ugly,” said Robert Rabang, a disenrolled member of the Nooksack Tribe.</p> <p>In 2013, the Nooksack Tribal Council began the process of “disenrolling” more than 300 members of the tribe - a group that calls themselves the Nooksack 306.</p> <p>This winter, 63 of the disenrolled members who remain on tribal-managed land are fighting eviction.</p> <p>Tribal leadership says that a Canadian ancestor from the 19th century wasn't a legal Nooksack, therefore her relatives aren't eligible to enroll in the tribe or to qualify for tribal benefits.</p> <p>Santana Rabang refers to herself as a disenrolled member of the Nooksack Tribe and was a teenager when this process started nearly a decade ago. Rabang has lost her tribal benefits and so have the elders.</p> <p>“They’re using the fact that our ancestral name wasn’t listed on a colonial document from 1942. That’s the main excuse that they’re using that we’re not Indigenous,” Rabang said.</p> <p>The Nooksack Indian Tribe has deep roots in the Pacific Northwest. They were recognized by the United States federal government in 1855 and today have a population of approximately 2,000 members.</p> <p>Gabe Galanda is a Seattle-based Indigenous Rights Lawyer who's representing members of the Nooksack 306.</p> <p>“The damage here is irreparable. I’m not convinced this tribe will ever be the same or will ever be a tribe again,” Galanda said.</p> <p>“If the 306 don’t belong there is nobody who is Nooksack that belongs. That’s what the powers that be are flirting with,” he continued.</p> <p>Galanda has long argued government overreach on behalf of the Nooksack Tribal Council and recently petitioned the United Nations Human Rights Council and the Biden administration to intervene.</p> <p>Federal intervention in indigenous matters is rare in the United States given the notion of tribal sovereignty. The constitution grants federally recognized Indian tribes the right to regulate internal affairs.</p> <p>On Thursday, a notice was prepared by three United Nations High Commissioners on Human Rights experts and, according to the UN, may be the first diplomatic action on record to address potential Indigenous human rights violations in the U.S.</p> <p>In a formal statement, the commission urged the United States to “halt” what they call “imminent forced evictions” of dozens of former Nooksack indigenous tribe members housing in Whatcom county.</p>

[In a statement](#), the tribe called the UN's investigation "[riddled with falsehoods](#)" and accused members of failing "to conduct even the most cursory investigation."

According to the tribe, the UN did not contact them before issuing the statement and also says there are eight members facing eviction, contradicting the Nooksack 306 claim of 63 residents.

Last week, in an interview with KING 5 before the United Nations statement was released, Nooksack Tribal Chairman Ross Cline said he maintains the enrollment of the members was a "fraud" and goes on to say the members and their decedents were never and will never be Nooksack.

Tribal leadership said they consider this issue resolved internally and say they plan to move forward with evictions.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Centralia businesses fined; Covid exposure
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/health/coronavirus/businesses-fined-workers-contract-covid/281-e0374cfc-d6b5-47e9-acf4-dd30155c265e
GIST	<p>At least one worker reported being told to work because they had not tested positive for COVID-19 when they actually had, according to L&I. Initially, nobody notified workers they were exposed.</p> <p>"Our investigation uncovered a widespread outbreak that put employees, their families, and their communities across 10 counties at risk for COVID-19," said Joel Sacks, L&I director. "The actions these companies took or failed to take undoubtedly made it worse — contributing to faster and broader spread of the virus in the workplace."</p> <p>The exposures occurred in a large warehouse serving hundreds of grocery stores and military operations. The warehouse is owned and operated by United Natural Foods, Inc. About 1,000 people work at the warehouse, with 600 working directly for United Natural Foods. The remainder of the workers are under contract.</p> <p>Following an initial investigation in July, the company told officials most operations were being temporarily shut down, according to L&I. However, shipments from the site continued with the general workforce.</p> <p>United Foods failed to provide information for employees who tested positive and claimed not to know who some people worked for, according to L&I. Employees were allowed to continue working, despite the company knowing – or should have known – about positive cases, according to L&I.</p> <p>An Order of Immediate Restraint was issued to ensure safety measures were put in place before the warehouse reopened.</p> <p>United Foods was cited \$140,000.</p> <p>Of the workers under contract at the warehouse, about 200 are employed by Capstone Logistics LLC. Of those, 54 tested positive for COVID; one was hospitalized.</p> <p>According to L&I, Capstone loaded crowded vans with employees without screening for COVID-19 symptoms or requiring masks. One worker was told he had not tested positive and to continue working, even though he had tested positive, according to L&I.</p> <p>Capstone was cited \$75,400.</p> <p>Of about two dozen people who work for Prime 360 in the warehouse, four tested positive for COVID, according to L&I.</p>

	<p>L&I's investigation found Prime 360's on-site manager showed "intentional disregard" for the health and safety of the workers. The manager told L&I it was his policy to assume employees not wearing masks were vaccinated.</p> <p>Capstone was fined \$70,000.</p> <p>Capstone and Prime 360 have appealed the citations and fines. The deadline for United Foods to appeal is Tuesday, Feb. 8.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 FBI seeks to recruit more diverse applicants
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/education/fbi-working-to-recruit-more-diverse-applicants/281-ecfedd91-1184-4b90-98ec-7c355507b310
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — On Seattle University's campus, students were taking part in the FBI practicum. It is a two-day course that exposes students who are already studying crime and justice to what the FBI does on a daily basis.</p> <p>On the morning of Feb. 4, Special Agent Stephanie Shark covered topics that ranged from Domestic Terrorism to Diversity within the FBI.</p> <p>"They have really worked hard to talk about it. We used to not talk about it," said Shark, referring to the Bureau's lack of diversity.</p> <p>Debi Dorfsman, who has been with the FBI for almost 20 years, has seen the problem too.</p> <p>"Historically, the FBI has been predominantly all white males," Dorfsman said. "If you don't see yourself in an organization, people don't feel there is a place for them in the organization."</p> <p>FBI data shows out of roughly 13,600 special agents, fewer than 5% are Black. But the number is rising. More women are joining, too.</p> <p>Approximately 19% of agents identify as a minority, according to the data. That number does not reflect the U.S. population. That is why the FBI says it is prioritizing the recruitment and retention of diverse, qualified talent.</p> <p>More figures from the FBI show that in fiscal year 2019, 23% of new agent class attendees were minorities. In fiscal year 2020, 24% were minorities. In fiscal year 2019, 36% of applicants were female. In fiscal year 2020 and 2021, 37% of applicants were female.</p> <p>"Yes, the numbers for minority agents is shocking low. However, they have risen over time. The one area that not only didn't rise, but dipped in the past decade was the number of female special agents. The FBI has been unable to break the 19% max number. By the end of 2020, the percentage of female agents reached almost 21%," said Shark.</p> <p>"When I started, I rarely saw a female agent at the table. I look every time and I am finally starting to see it," Shark continued.</p> <p>The FBI says the practicum course, which has been offered at Seattle University for more than a decade, is helping to recruit more diverse applicants.</p> <p>"I do think it opens doors on a number of levels," said Professor Jaqueline Helfgott, director of Seattle University's Crime and Justice Research Center.</p>

	<p>"We've had lots of students who've been successful, but they need that extra sort of help and connection with a real person to be able to help them move forward in that direction," Helfgott said.</p> <p>She says that's what the practicum has done in the past, and current students hope it continues.</p> <p>"I am half Indonesian and I can speak the language, and so I think it would be interesting to kind of use what I know in the FBI and make it more diverse," said Azzia MacDonald, a senior at Seattle University.</p> <p>Special Agent Shark said she never thought the FBI was a possibility, until someone recruited her.</p> <p>"And now I am here, looking for those future people who look like me, who don't see themselves in the FBI, but we see them as our future," Shark said.</p> <p>The FBI also works to recruit students through an Honors Internship Program and a Collegiate Hiring Initiative.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Pressure grows to roll back mask mandate
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/pressure-grows-inslee-roll-back-mask-mandate/WL23PZGP5JHPFIG6GOC7AYPNFM/
GIST	<p>OLYMPIA, Wash. — With California and Oregon rolling back indoor mask mandates, pressure is growing on Washington Gov. Jay Inslee to do the same.</p> <p>Washington's current mask rule began last August in the Delta surge.</p> <p>Now, with Omicron declining, Oregon plans to end its indoor mask mandate by March 31, and California will allow vaccinated people to go maskless inside starting Feb. 15.</p> <p>Inslee's office said he was not available for an interview Tuesday, but wrote, "We are continuing to track cases, hospitalizations and deaths. We are optimistic that these numbers will continue to decline in a way that will let us revisit the mask requirements in the near future."</p> <p>Inslee plans to talk with reporters on Wednesday.</p> <p>Republican party leaders say a change should happen soon.</p> <p>"I absolutely think it is time to roll back the mask mandate," said GOP state party chair Caleb Heimlich.</p> <p>Ali Mokdad at the University of Washington's Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation projects that by mid-March at the latest, we will be out of a pandemic phase as COVID becomes endemic.</p> <p>"It's the beginning of the end, it's not the end, it's the beginning of the end. And yes, by the end of this month, our level of infection will be very low," Mokdad said.</p> <p>Mokdad said its important for officials to soon announce criteria for rescinding the mask mandate.</p> <p>"You don't want to lose trust. It's very important to build trust, it's very important to level with the public," Mokdad said.</p> <p>Still, on a hospital association call Tuesday, there was hesitation about rolling back too quickly.</p> <p>"I think it's too early to even talk about that idea, personally," said Dr. Kunal Joshi of Overlake Medical Center.</p> <p>Restaurants are on the front lines of mask rules.</p>

	<p>Bob Donegan of Ivar's said he trusts the health experts, as do most of his customers.</p> <p>Last week at all their locations, Ivar's served 51,000 people.</p> <p>"Fewer than 12 people complained about having to wear a mask, so at least for our customers, it hasn't been a big issue," Donegan said.</p> <p>Employers are also watching mask rules closely.</p> <p>"We're looking for certainty and predictability. This is a moment of time where we need to know where are we at, and have we rounded that corner," said Kristofer Johnson from the Association of Washington Business.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Seattle eviction moratorium set to expire
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/seattles-eviction-moratorium-set-to-expire-feb-14-tenants-and-landlords-weigh-in
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — Seattle's mayor is meeting with tenants and landlords this week to decide whether he'll extend the city's eviction moratorium again. It's set to expire next Monday.</p> <p>Since the beginning of the pandemic, the moratorium has been extended seven times.</p> <p>The most recent time, Mayor Bruce Harrell said vulnerable people must be allowed to stay in their homes as we fight the rapid spread of the omicron variant.</p> <p>Across the city of Seattle, the cost of rent is rising for many people.</p> <p>"Now, I'm paying around \$1,350," said Lauren Sanchez in Capitol Hill. "I wouldn't be surprised if it will go up. From my friends, they're telling me their rent is going up like \$200-\$300."</p> <p>The cost of rent is really hitting people like Jacob Martin-Richardson hard.</p> <p>He used to be a restaurant manager. But he's been out of work and trying to go back to school.</p> <p>"I'm \$15,000 behind on rent," said Martin-Richardson. "And that's from August of last year."</p> <p>The eviction moratorium helped Martin-Richardson get by, but it ends Monday. And now, the Mayor must decide to continue or end it.</p> <p>Julissa Sanchez is with the Washington Tenants Union.</p> <p>She said people could end up homeless is the eviction ban is not extended.</p> <p>"Many tenants are being evicted because they are not working all the hours they're used to working, especially undocumented Latin community workers and tenants that work in the service industry," Sanchez said.</p> <p>But small property landlords said extending the ban on evictions is just not fair to them.</p> <p>"We've got tens of thousands of dollars of unpaid rents and utility bills," said Corey Brewer with Seattle Grassroots Landlord Association which has as many as 400 members.</p>

"I'm hearing from a lot of mom and pop housing providers who are not in a good housing situation, who had renters who have not paid any rent in two years, who have been destroying the property, who have been harassing them," said landlord MariLyn Yim.

Many landlords said the moratorium just does not allow for non-payments to add up. They said it enables tenants to behave badly.

"The moratorium allows behavioral issues to go completely unchecked," Brewer said. "That is just people not being good citizens and good neighbors taking advantage of this blanket protection that they have, and that is what you will continue to see persist."

Yim wants the mayor to step back from the eviction moratorium.

"We already have significant protections for tenants in place," Yim said. "We already have an off-ramp and ways for people to be able to access the assistance they need."

Instead of extending the moratorium, she hopes the Mayor would instead offer some rental assistance. "Because I think that's where the worry is," Yim said. "There are people who are waiting on the cash rental assistance that needs to get out to them."

Back to Martin-Richardson. He applied for rent assistance last May. He just found out Monday he was finally approved for financial help. That's nine months after he first applied for it.

"It's crazy," Martin-Richardson said.

KOMO News asked Mayor Harrell what he plans to do about Seattle's eviction moratorium.

A spokesman said the mayor is meeting with small landlords and tenant advocates to better understand what extending or ending the moratorium would do.

The mayor's office released this statement:

"The mayor is continuing to meet with stakeholder groups of small landlords and tenant advocates as outlined in his additional Executive Order announced last month. These meetings are critical for understanding the full implications of extending or ending the eviction moratorium. The Executive Order also directed an interdepartmental team of City departments to pull together data around impacted households, outstanding rent, and other key data points, as well as having other City departments identify and report available rental and utility assistance resources.

We'll have more to share later this week."

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HEADLINE	02/08 Trade deficit hit record level in 2021
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/economic-recovery-pushes-2021-u-s-trade-deficit-to-record-level-11644328979?mod=hp_listb_pos1
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—Continued strong consumer appetite for overseas goods pushed up the U.S. trade deficit in December, sending the full-year import-export gap to a record level in 2021.</p> <p>The December deficit in trade of goods and services grew by 1.8% to a seasonally adjusted \$80.7 billion, the Commerce Department said Tuesday, just less than the record deficit of \$80.8 billion in September. The full-year trade deficit for 2021 increased 27% to \$859.1 billion, larger than the previous record of \$763.53 billion in 2006. Annual trade balance records date to 1960.</p> <p>The sharp increase in the trade deficit comes as the U.S. economy continues to recover strongly from the pandemic-induced slump during 2020. American consumers have spent heavily on imported goods such as computers, game machines and furniture, flush with stimulus money while less willing to splurge on</p>

travels and dining out due to health concerns. Robust demand for capital goods from businesses, as well as [higher prices of energy](#) and food items, have also added to U.S. import bills.

The International Monetary Fund estimates the U.S. economy grew by 5.6% in 2021, faster than most advanced economies whose average growth rate was 5%.

In December, imports rose 1.6% to \$308.9 billion, growing more quickly than exports, which expanded by 1.5% to \$228.1 billion, the Commerce Department said. Imports were bolstered by strong consumer demand for cellphones, toys and automobiles, while the growth in exports were supported by pharmaceutical preparations, auto and auto parts and nonmonetary gold.

The increases in December exports and imports suggest [global supply chain problems](#) are easing, said Andrew Hunter, senior U.S. economist for Capital Economics, a research firm. “Trade in both directions appears to have benefited from easing congestion at U.S. ports towards the end of last year,” he wrote in a research note Tuesday. He noted that the widening deficit will continue to push down the overall economic growth rate during the first quarter of this year.

Trade deficit with China grew 14.5% for the full year to \$355.3 billion, as U.S. demand for Chinese goods surged amid the post-pandemic economic recovery. The level was still well below the record trade deficit of \$418.2 billion the U.S. set with China in 2018.

A trade pact with China implemented by former President [Donald Trump](#) to reduce the bilateral deficit with Chinese purchase commitments for U.S. goods expired on Dec. 31. Economists say [China had fallen sharply behind](#) the goals, creating pressure for the Biden administration to hold Beijing accountable for falling short.

Sarah Bianchi, deputy U.S. Trade Representative, said the U.S. is “actively engaged with China” to address bilateral trade issues. “It’s really clear that the Chinese have not lived up to their Phase One commitment,” she said last week during a panel discussion, referring to the bilateral agreement. “That’s something we’re trying to address.”

U.S. officials haven’t said what measures they will take to respond to China’s failure to meet the purchase commitments.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Seattle council Starbucks union resolution
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-city-council-spars-over-passes-starbucks-union-resolution/
GIST	<p>A resolution expressing solidarity with Starbucks employees organizing labor unions spurred heated, lengthy debate on the Seattle City Council Tuesday about the city’s role in private business.</p> <p>Councilmember Kshama Sawant’s resolution to express support of workers at three Seattle Starbucks locations who are attempting to unionize passed the council 6-0 on Tuesday with Councilmembers Sara Nelson and Alex Pedersen not voting and Councilmember Lisa Herbold absent from the meeting.</p> <p>The actual resolution does not introduce any action by the city, but rather expresses the six council members’ support of the workers trying to organize. Still, it prompted debate among council members over the purpose of symbolic resolutions and stoked old debates among the council’s liberal faction.</p> <p>Nelson and Pedersen opted out of voting for or against the resolution — though current council rules do not allow for a formal abstention, which will be addressed in a future committee meeting — both claiming to be pro-labor, but taking issue with the council’s role in private business.</p> <p>“I was not elected to take votes on issues that fall beyond the purview of city business. And I believe that a vote on resolution 32041 would be just merely symbolic,” Nelson said.</p>

“This is an external labor issue and we have no authority of Starbucks and its employees,” she added.

Pedersen similarly said he would not vote on the resolution because it was not directly city business, instead urging his colleagues to spend time addressing crime, homelessness and the city’s budget, among “scores” of issues within the scope of the council.

Councilmember Andrew Lewis, who supported the resolution, argued that supporting labor initiatives can reduce the likelihood of Seattleites becoming homeless or otherwise relying on city programming, and is therefore a matter of city business.

Sawant criticized Nelson and Pedersen, saying elected officials cannot be “neutral” on labor issues in which corporations and wealthy owners are against the working class.

“This is very much city business,” Sawant said. “If you are an elected official, you cannot say you are pro-labor and then vote ‘no’ or withhold your vote on this resolution. It simply doesn’t work.”

But the biggest scrum broke out between Sawant and Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda — who supported and sponsored an amendment for the resolution — when Sawant criticized the Democrats on the council for their past labor votes.

“When council members say that it’s ‘not city business’ what they really mean is it is city business, they’re just not on the side that you want us to be on,” Sawant said.

An example Sawant gave was a December vote by the council to end [\\$4/hour COVID-19 hazard pay for grocery workers](#) which every member of the council voted to support, except Sawant. When the council revisited the resolution — which was [vetoed by then-Mayor Jenny Durkan](#) as the omicron variant surged — the council [voted against their own resolution, ultimately allowing hazard pay to continue](#).

Mosqueda, who sponsored the formation of the hazard pay in January 2021, defended her December vote, noting that the council had extended the temporary fix four times in the year since its passage.

She also said Sawant’s comment contained “misinformation” and “actually undermines the effort to try to tear down folks who are wanting to support unionizing efforts and wanting to support a broader effort for progressive values.”

After Mosqueda’s retort, Council President Debora Juarez said she was ending the discussion to move on with the vote, but Sawant continued.

“I am the prime sponsor of the bill so I do want to respond very briefly,” Sawant said, before Juarez tried to interject. “That was not misinformation, that was not misinformation. That was a fact.”

Sawant continued to discuss the hazard pay vote and Mosqueda began to argue directly.

“Can I have the clerk mute everybody because apparently people can’t behave,” Juarez said, with Mosqueda still speaking. “Clerk, can you please mute it?”

“Please mute it. Mute everybody,” she repeated.

After the clerk muted the council members, Juarez told her colleagues to “take a breath,” before reminding them to follow rules of order, barring them from insulting one another or bringing up other members’ past votes in discussion.

“I do not want to go back down this rabbit hole again,” she said. “I am just trying to get this resolution passed, which is a simple resolution, regarding Starbucks and unionization.”

HEADLINE	02/08 Covid hospitalizations falling in Washington
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/covid-hospitalizations-now-falling-throughout-wa/
GIST	<p>COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations are falling throughout Washington state as the surge of the omicron variant subsides.</p> <p>But in a Tuesday morning news briefing, Cassie Sauer, president of the Washington State Hospital Association, said the tail end of the omicron wave will likely persist for at least a few more weeks and hospital leaders remain worried about the recent wave's lasting effects on their staffers and supply of equipment.</p> <p>"Better does not mean it's over. ... We really don't want people to rip off their masks or go to big parties quite yet — COVID activity remains a threat," Sauer said.</p> <p>In King County, public health officials are counting about 1,428 infections per day, about a 50% drop from the past seven days, and 30 hospitalizations per day, about a 33% drop since the prior week.</p> <p>Hospitalizations are also falling statewide. At the beginning of the month, Washington counted 1,958 hospitalizations, compared to about 1,635 this week. As of late January, the state had also counted a seven-day average of about 16,365 infections per day, compared to 19,000 infections per day in mid-January.</p> <p>"This is the first week in a while we've been able to report that kind of decline," Sauer said. "... As people are discharged from the hospital from COVID or die from COVID, there are fewer people coming in behind them to fill the space."</p> <p>Eastern Washington is beginning to mirror the same trend. In Spokane County, for example, about 196 people were hospitalized with COVID a week ago, compared to about 170 Tuesday, Sauer said.</p> <p>However, deaths are still high, with 25 to 30 per day throughout the state.</p> <p>Fortunately, Sauer said, hospitals have seen a "major" decrease in the number of staffers who have been out sick with a COVID infection or exposure. About a month ago, more than 800 hospital workers were isolating or quarantining and unable to work. As of Monday, Sauer said, the number had decreased to about 100.</p> <p>"That is a really good shift and very helpful for hospital capacity," Sauer said, adding that the decline in cases is allowing hospitals to work through a "backlog of delayed care procedures."</p> <p>Despite signs of good news, Sauer said it's still too early for Washingtonians to let their guard down. People should continue to mask up, avoid crowded gatherings and get vaccinated and boosted, Sauer said.</p> <p>Hospital workers remain overworked, discharging patients from health care facilities to long-term care centers is still slow moving and personal protective equipment — especially N95 masks — is again in short supply in many hospitals, Sauer said.</p> <p>She pointed to a proclamation that Gov. Jay Inslee issued last month that requires all hospitals to operate with "conventional levels of PPE," meaning they're able to maintain 30 days' worth of PPE for workers and have enough on hand for a possible surge.</p> <p>"That is absolutely not where hospitals are now," Sauer said.</p> <p>The requirement for conventional use, she said, is "burning through the supplies far too quickly" because it requires hospitals to discard masks after every patient interaction.</p>

	<p>Hospital leaders have asked the state for further guidance on operating under conventional use requirements, she said, but in the meantime they are still in desperate need of additional masks — which are generally different from those being distributed for free within the community.</p> <p>“We are talking about the medical-grade N95 that staff have been fit-tested,” Sauer said. “... Those are hard to find.”</p> <p>At Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital, for example, all staffers undergo a fit-testing process where they step into an enclosed space, put an N95 mask on, then get sprayed with a sugar spray to see if they can taste it.</p> <p>“The particle size of the saccharin (sweetener) molecule is large enough that you shouldn’t be able to taste it,” Marty Brueggemann, chief medical officer of Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital, explained during the briefing. “So these are really tight-fitting, validated masks.”</p> <p>The lack of enough masks could catch the state’s health care systems flat-footed if we see another surge in the near future, Sauer said.</p> <p>“To say that we are out of this and that we can let our guard down is very premature,” Brueggemann said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Olympic medalist homeless in Seattle
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/homeless/olympic-medal-winning-cyclist-rebecca-twigg-is-homeless-in-seattle/
GIST	<p>When Rebecca Twigg was 7, she rode a bike for the first time. There were no training wheels, but Twigg took off like she’d done it in a previous life. She fell only when she realized she didn’t know how to stop, and steered into a wall.</p> <p>“I took to the road like I was born to do it,” Twigg says today. “Except for the little part about stopping. I’m not a very good planner.”</p> <p>The Seattle-raised athlete went on to become one of the most famous American cyclists in the ’80s and ’90s, winning six world championships and medaling in two Olympics. She appeared on cycling magazine covers, in sponsor ads and in features in Sports Illustrated and Vanity Fair.</p> <p>But then, in 1996, she left the team abruptly during the Olympics and the next year, retired from cycling. She re-entered the workforce. It didn’t work out.</p> <p>“Once you’ve done something that feels like you’re born to do it, it’s hard to find anything that’s that good of a fit,” Twigg says today. “Anything else that feels that way.”</p> <p>Rebecca Twigg has now been without a home for almost five years in Seattle, living first with friends and family, then in her car, then in homeless shelters and then, for a night, under garbage bags on the street downtown. She hasn’t had a bike for years, and no one recognizes her anymore, she says.</p> <p>Twigg, 56, agreed to share her story to convince the public that not all homeless people are addicted to drugs or alcohol; that there are many like her, who have struggled with employment and are “confused,” as she said she is, about what to do next with their lives. She did not want to discuss mental health but feels it should be treated more seriously in Washington.</p> <p>“Some of the hard days are really painful when you’re training for racing,” Twigg said, “but being homeless, when you have little hope or knowledge of where the finish line is going to be, is just as hard.”</p>

On a recent morning, Twigg walked into Mary's Place Women's Day Center in downtown Seattle. She used to come here frequently after leaving one of a number of night shelters. Lots of women are here, taking showers or doing laundry, helping to clean. Talking with them is better than "getting lost in my own thoughts," she says.

Hedwight Amoda, director at the center, walks up.

"I haven't seen you in a minute! Where are you?" Amoda asks.

"On the living room floor," Twigg says, smiling. "On a mat." She's been staying with relatives in the area the last few weeks while she recovers from a bad flu. Her immediate family in the Seattle area, including her 18-year-old daughter, declined interviews for this story.

Amoda was struck, soon after meeting Twigg in 2017, by how intelligent she was, how fit she looked in sports clothes and how late she stayed to clean after the day center closed. When Amoda learned who Twigg was, she was surprised that this woman, regarded as America's best cyclist when she quit in 1997, is homeless today.

"I'm still confused, but I'm figuring it out," Twigg tells Amoda.

"I kind of lost my home base"

Twigg was still a child when she became homeless.

A prodigy in academics and athletics, she started at UW at the age of 14, competing in cycling that same year and medaling in national races almost right away. At this time, she was living in Seattle in a basement with her mother and sister.

Twigg's sister says their mom kicked Twigg out; Twigg remembers being offered the option to leave and taking it. She was a few months from turning 16. She rode her bike to the old downtown Greyhound station, stayed up all night, and slept a few hours in the UW Library the next morning before calling her team leader and crashing at his house. The next years — as Twigg became a cycling star — were transient. She went from friends' houses to hotels on the road while racing.

"I kind of lost my home base because I traveled so much," Twigg said.

She was spotted at 17 by famous cycling coach Eddie Borysewicz. After she won the world championship, he invited her to live in the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs and train for the 1984 Olympic Games, where for the first time, women would be competing on bicycles.

Americans dominated the Olympics that year. Twigg won a silver medal, missing gold by a few inches to famous racer Connie Carpenter. She continued on her way up over the next several years, setting world records, winning world titles, and racing more than 60 times a year. She became known for her competition in individual pursuit, where two cyclists start at the same time on opposite sides of the track and each tries to catch the other. She's still among the most-decorated athletes in pursuit.

But the breakneck pace couldn't continue forever. She was married and soon after divorced. She crashed in Texas, broke her thumb and got 13 stitches in her head. The following year she felt burned out. She took a break at age 26, and that year she grew an entire inch, possibly because her body no longer had to expend so much energy training.

Twigg got an associate degree in computer science and became a programmer for a seaweed-products company in San Diego.

Twigg says the career wasn't a perfect fit. She quit and started training for the 1992 Olympic Games, winning a bronze medal in the 3,000-meter pursuit after only nine months of training. As she entered her 30s, she became regarded as the best American female cyclist.

The break with her career came in July 1996, at the Olympic Games in Atlanta. After a disappointing start to the Games, she left, saying the U.S. Cycling Federation was pressuring everyone to recreate the success of 1984. She raced in 1997, but placed eighth in the world championships. She retired for good.

From a bike to a desk

Twigg went back to desk jobs in IT, then back to school for massage therapy. It didn't pay enough, and she was offered another tech job. She married again, and had a daughter.

It was a far cry from winning medals for Twigg, and beyond that, she said the solitary nature of programming troubled her. She'd been friendly but introverted for much of her time traveling, according to fellow cyclist Inga Thompson, who traveled and competed alongside her for years.

Entering the workforce is hard for anyone that's been a famous athlete, but it can be especially hard for superstar cyclists like Twigg, Thompson said.

"As a racer, you're used to having a schedule kind of rotate around you," Thompson said, "because you can't overtrain, you don't want to under-train, and you're able to say 'I'm not doing that today, I'm doing this today.' And Rebecca, being so highly trained, and highly attuned, had the leeway of making those calls."

Thompson herself has avoided working at a desk. Today, she owns a cattle ranch in Oregon, where she's her own boss. Thompson jokes she's "unemployable."

"What (Twigg) has is a great trait," Thompson said. "Unless you get into the workforce."

Twigg would take unspecified amounts of time off and sometimes be unreachable. Once, when she didn't show up to work for four days, her co-workers called the police for a welfare check, according to a family member.

Sometimes there were miscommunications. When Twigg got back to the office after the welfare check, her desk phone didn't work. Scared she was about to be fired, Twigg quit. She later learned they hadn't planned on firing her.

Twigg didn't have much money to fall back on. Even with sponsorships, at the height of her success, Twigg says she didn't make more than \$50,000 a year.

Twigg said anxiety inhibited her job search. She would apply and get an email about an interview, but she wouldn't respond. She started experiencing strange sensations in her head and body, but doctors didn't have any answers. She said she has considered suicide, but is convinced things don't get better on "the other side."

Five years ago, Twigg was fired from an IT support job and moved back to Seattle, but this time didn't even apply for jobs. She was 50, and felt the job postings in computer science were aimed at new college graduates.

She went from living with relatives to living in her car, letting her then-14-year-old daughter stay with relatives. Riding her bike no longer made sense to her, practically; she got sweaty if it was warm, or wet if it was raining, and staying clean and dry is hard when you're homeless.

She gave away her bike, her cycling taking a back seat to surviving. She started walking everywhere, slowly, to conserve energy.

"I just had my head really mixed up"

Twigg compares homelessness to traveling with no end to your trip. “You can never go home to rest,” Twigg said. She moved from her car to women’s and coed shelters in Seattle, and the pace of life there, too, was slow.

“There are some shelters where it’s like a bus station. You’re just staring at someone else — it’s so boring.” But she says shelters kept her alive; today, this former Olympian is hassled off sidewalks by security guards, and struggles to find a place where she can simply stand around.

In February, during the massive snowstorm, she saw people sleeping on the streets and felt bad that she had a warm bed in a shelter. There’s an odd “concert mentality” when you’re homeless, Twigg said, where it can be hard to separate yourself from the crowd. Her guilt and a sense that she had “unfair advantages” in life haven’t gone away.

“I felt at one time that I couldn’t accept housing because there were all these other people who need it,” Twigg said.

She decided to sleep outside, even if just for a night. She left the shelters, bought some garbage bags and got a thin blanket, and lay down on a sidewalk downtown, pulling one bag over her legs and one bag over her head.

“I was shivering, partly from fear, and partly from cold,” Twigg said. “I had this feeling of not really belonging anywhere. I just had my head really mixed up, totally confused about what I should be doing.”

At 5 a.m., a security guard woke her up. Her blanket was wet. She went to a shelter that would let her in, and slept for half an hour sitting up. She knew she couldn’t spend another night outside.

In March, as her 56th birthday approached, she got the flu and had to go to the hospital. From there, she persuaded a relative to take her in again so she could convalesce.

From her own experience, Twigg thinks the answer is building more affordable housing.

“Shelters are great, but there has to be a next step,” Twigg said. She still won’t accept housing for herself, even when help is offered by people who’ve found out about her state; her homelessness was mentioned in a cycling magazine last month.

“The point is not so much that I need help, it’s that there are a bunch of people who need help — 12,000 in this area, half a million in the country,” Twigg said. “Help should be provided for everybody, not just a few.”

Even if they are Olympians.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Macron shuttle diplomacy fails to deliver
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/08/world/ukraine-russia-news#macrons-shuttle-diplomacy-fails-to-ease-the-crisis-for-now
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — The Kremlin on Tuesday rebuffed the idea that President Emanuel Macron of France and President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia had made meaningful progress toward defusing the Ukraine crisis in their high-stakes meeting in Moscow.</p> <p>Statements by Russian leaders appeared to undercut French diplomatic authority, and even credibility, just as Mr. Macron arrived in Ukraine to continue his shuttle diplomacy, with 130,000 Russian troops just outside Ukraine and the White House warning that an attack on Ukraine could be imminent.</p>

Even before Mr. Macron's plane touched down in Kyiv, the Ukrainian capital, Dmitri S. Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, rejected reports that the two presidents had reached any agreement to de-escalate, suggesting that it was the United States, not France, that had standing to negotiate such a deal.

"In the current situation, Moscow and Paris could not make a deal. France is an E.U. and NATO member," he said, adding: "France is not leading NATO."

He also took issue with news reports quoting French officials as saying that Mr. Macron had left Moscow with commitments that Russian troops would not stay in neighboring Belarus after the completion of military exercises this month, and that Russia would not conduct any new military maneuvers near Ukraine in the near future.

The deployment to Ukraine was always intended to be temporary, but Russia made no promise about when it would end, Mr. Peskov said. He declined to comment on the report about new maneuvers, but Russia said on Tuesday that elements of its navy had been dispatched to the Black Sea waters near Ukraine.

Mr. Putin and Mr. Macron held a five-hour, one-on-one meeting at the Kremlin on Monday night, and then a joint news conference that went well past midnight. Mr. Putin swung between ominous and something verging on optimistic, keeping his comments vague enough to keep the world guessing.

"A number of his ideas or proposals — which it is probably too early to speak about — I see as rather feasible for creating a foundation for our further steps," he said of Mr. Macron. But he also warned of war with NATO if Ukraine joins the alliance, and did not rule out an invasion, though the Kremlin has insisted it has no plans for one.

In Kyiv on Tuesday to meet with Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, Mr. Macron said: "You must not underestimate the tension that surrounds the situation that we are living through, its unprecedented nature. I do not believe this crisis can be solved thanks to a few hours of discussions."

Mr. Peskov said that Mr. Putin was prepared to keep negotiating over Russia's security demands in Eastern Europe, but added: "So far, we don't see and feel the readiness of our Western counterparts to take our concerns into account." The United States and NATO have flatly rejected Russian demands to cease the bloc's expansion into parts of Eastern Europe that Moscow considers part of its sphere of influence.

Mr. Macron emphasized that addressing Russia's concerns about NATO and its presence in Eastern Europe was only one half of the diplomatic approach he was pursuing. The other, to address the continuing conflict between Ukraine and Russian-backed separatists in two breakaway eastern Ukrainian provinces through the so-called Normandy Format, showed more signs of promise. Negotiators from France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia are expected to meet again in Berlin this week to continue to work through disagreements around the terms of a 2015 cease-fire.

Mr. Zelensky said that he viewed the upcoming Berlin meeting positively, although he did not yet see an indication that Russia was willing to end its occupation of Crimea, the peninsula that Russia seized in a 2014 invasion, and pull Russian troops from the eastern Ukraine region known as Donbas. Ukraine has said that a Russian withdrawal is a prerequisite for any deal.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Ukraine: will not compromise sovereignty
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/live/2022/02/08/world/ukraine-russia-news#ukraine-says-it-will-not-compromise-its-sovereignty-in-talks-involving-russia
GIST	KYIV, Ukraine — Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, said on Tuesday that his government would not cross "red lines" that infringe on its sovereignty in negotiations on a settlement with Russia.

The shuttle diplomacy undertaken this week by President Emmanuel Macron of France is in part exploring whether Ukraine and Russia can agree to a settlement that might ease the broader tensions in Europe after Russia massed troops near Ukraine's borders.

After talks with Mr. Macron in Moscow on Monday, President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia suggested that Moscow would insist Kyiv accept its terms on a cease-fire agreement for the war in eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian forces have been locked in a bloody stalemate with Russia-backed separatists since 2014. That agreement — negotiated in Minsk, Belarus, in 2015 — includes terms that could give the Kremlin a way to influence Ukraine's foreign policy decisions.

"You may like it, you may not like it — deal with it, my gorgeous," Mr. Putin said of Ukraine's president, using a crude expression derived from a Russian rhyme.

Speaking to reporters in Kyiv on Tuesday, Mr. Kuleba said that the Russian government was seeking to force a settlement on Ukraine to destabilize the country's internal politics in ways that might benefit Russia, without having to resort to military action despite having deployed around 130,000 troops near the border, according to U.S. and Ukrainian officials. He said that Ukraine could not be forced into agreeing to Russia's terms on the settlement deal, known as the Minsk accords.

"We see that Russia's current baseline scenario is to try to destabilize the internal situation in Ukraine by using the threat of force, but not of the armed forces themselves," Mr. Kuleba said.

"I have said many times, including yesterday, that we are open to dialogue, we are constructive, we are looking for a diplomatic solution, but we will not cross our red lines, and no one will be able to force us to cross them," Mr. Kuleba said.

Mr. Putin's comments highlighted the unpalatable options for President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, making explicit that if he accepts Moscow's terms, they will have been forced on Kyiv.

Mr. Zelensky, a former comedian, won a 2019 election with 73 percent of the vote after campaigning on a platform of pursuing a peace settlement with Russia. But his political opposition is sure to seize on any signs of yielding to Russian pressure.

Mr. Putin's comment led news reports in Ukraine on Tuesday, and members of organizations opposed to concessions to Moscow posted on social media that the Russian leader had used a rape metaphor. Mr. Putin, wrote Oleksandr Ivanov, a coordinator of the Resistance Movement Against Capitulation, "once again demonstrated the true essence of the Minsk agreements, which is the rape of Ukraine."

On Monday, before his meeting with Mr. Putin, Mr. Macron told reporters that "one of the models on the table" for de-escalating the crisis was the "Finlandization" of Ukraine. That term alludes to how Finland, facing the Soviet Union during the Cold War, was able to maintain independence from its powerful neighbor and survive as a democracy on condition of strict neutrality.

In the current context, it would mean that Ukraine would never join NATO — a scenario that Western officials characterize as a far-off possibility, but one that the Kremlin describes as an existential threat — and that Russia would exercise considerable influence over its political options.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Dispute: Europe cuts payments to Poland
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/world/europe/eu-poland-fine.html
GIST	BRUSSELS — The European Union will withhold millions of euros in payments to Poland to recover unpaid fines, the bloc said on Tuesday, the first time it has used such a method to discipline a member country and deepening a rift when tensions in the region have been mounting over the crisis in Ukraine.

The move by the European Commission, the European Union's executive arm, underscored its determination to pursue a new, more aggressive strategy with wayward members even amid shows of unity within the bloc with Russian troops massing on the border with Ukraine.

The commission said it would pursue a formal procedure to recover the fines that the Polish government has refused to pay in a dispute over its refusal to comply with an E.U. legal order related to its operation of a lignite mine, a day after Poland's president, Andrzej Duda, met with top E.U. officials, including Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission.

The meetings were ostensibly over the Ukraine crisis, but they were overshadowed at least in part by tensions between Poland and the European Union over what the bloc sees as [democratic backsliding](#) by Warsaw and its refusal to abide by E.U. law, although Mr. Duda was eager on Monday to stress the need to focus on the external threat.

The commission, which is expected to withhold about 15 million euros, or about \$17 million, said it would continue to pursue remaining unpaid penalties, which by now have snowballed to around 60 million euros.

Poland and the European Union have been embroiled for years in a bitter feud over a wide array of issues that European officials say is the result of Poland's efforts to untether itself from the bloc's rules and standards. That includes efforts to [marginalize its L.G.B.T.Q. community](#), its [assertion that Polish law is paramount to E.U. law](#), and its reluctance to phase out fossil fuels in line with Europe's ambitious climate policy.

The European Union is now facing an existential dilemma over how to deal with members — [like Poland or Hungary](#) — that refuse to play by what the bloc sees as fundamental rules but do not intend to follow the example of Britain, which left in 2020, preferring to reap the benefits of E.U. membership that are primarily financial.

The European Court of Justice in September fined Poland 500,000 euros a day for [refusing to comply with its ruling to halt operations of a lignite mine](#) near the Czech Republic pending a ruling on a lawsuit brought by the Czech government.

Poland had said for months that it did not intend to obey the order to halt the mining operations as it would jeopardize the country's energy security. But on Thursday, the government signed an agreement with the Czech government ending the dispute.

Despite that deal, the commission said it would still deduct the accumulated fines from the funds that Poland is scheduled to receive this year. Poland is the first member in E.U. history to refuse to pay a penalty imposed by the bloc's top court.

Poland is also the largest recipient of E.U. funds, which have been used to modernize the country, financing everything from roads and railways to farmers' subsidies and scientific research. But the commission insisted on Tuesday that the budget cuts would not affect ordinary Poles, but the government.

Balazs Ujvari, the bloc's spokesman for budgetary issues, said: "The member state in question remains under the obligation to continue its payments to final beneficiaries."

Last month, Piotr Muller, a spokesman for the Polish government called collecting the penalties "contrary to E.U. law." Reacting to Tuesday's announcement, Mr. Muller said: "Poland will use all possible legal means to appeal against the commission's plans."

Although the amount deducted from Poland on Tuesday is relatively small — the E.U. contributed about 18 billion euros to the country in 2020 — it is a significant step in the dispute, analysts say.

“We are reaching a moment when push is coming to shove, and the E.U. instruments are starting to bite,” said Georg Riekeles, associate director of the Brussels-based European Policy Center. “It will force Poland to make political decisions. Fundamentally, this situation is no longer sustainable long term.”

The governing Law and Justice party in Poland has been under mounting domestic pressure over soaring inflation and a botched response to the Covid-19 pandemic and needs all the E.U. money it can get. But the objective of keeping together a fragile governing coalition that includes a far-right fraction, which opposes any compromise with Brussels, limits the government’s scope of action, analysts say.

The bloc’s top court is set to rule next week on the validity of a new rule that links disbursement of all E.U. money to respect for the rule of law, which could hit Poland particularly hard.

In a separate case, Poland is also facing a deadline to pay 69 million euros for refusing to comply with the court’s order to suspend a disciplinary system for judges, which critics say has been used by the government as a tool of intimidation. The fine, which has been increasing by one million euros daily, is also to be deducted from the regular payments next month, the commission said.

In a bid to strike a compromise with Brussels, Mr. Duda last week proposed dismantling part of the disciplinary system, which is one of the key issues at the heart of Poland’s standoff with the bloc, suggesting a softening of the Polish government’s position.

After the meeting with E.U. officials on Monday, Mr. Duda warned of internal E.U. divisions given the threat of a conflict with Russia: “Any conflict within the European Union is now grist to the mill to our adversaries.”

But legal analysts say that Mr. Duda’s draft bill does not fully address the bloc’s concerns, and given that it already faced criticism from the far-right partners in the ruling coalition, it is unlikely to make its way through the country’s legislative process intact.

“This is an attempt to eat the cake, and have it too,” said Jakub Jaraczewski, research coordinator at Democracy Reporting International. “Even if it would pass, it still leaves the government many options to intimidate rebellious judges.”

Still, some analysts say that the tensions over Ukraine, just across the border from Poland, could eventually help calm the tensions between Warsaw and Brussels.

“This crisis can ultimately build more unity,” said Mr. Riekeles of the European Policy Center. “When you have Russia playing war on your periphery, it will help to drive the Europeans together, including Poland, rather than the opposite.”

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HEADLINE	02/08 Russia keeps the world guessing
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/world/europe/macrons-shuttle-diplomacy-moves-to-ukraine-as-russia-keeps-the-world-guessing.html
GIST	<p>KYIV, Ukraine — President Emmanuel Macron of France said on Tuesday that the Ukraine crisis could take months to resolve, but that his shuttle diplomacy this week between Russia and Ukraine had raised hopes of stabilizing the situation.</p> <p>Mr. Macron met President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine in Kyiv on Tuesday, a day after holding a five-hour meeting with President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia in Moscow.</p> <p>The Kremlin said on Tuesday that there were “seeds of reason” in proposals Mr. Macron had put forward during the meeting with Mr. Putin. But Mr. Putin’s spokesman, Dmitri S. Peskov, rejected reports that the two leaders had reached any sort of agreement on de-escalating the crisis, which Western nations say has</p>

been incited by Russia's buildup around Ukraine of roughly 130,000 troops, many of which appear to be [in the final stages of readiness for an invasion](#).

Mr. Putin was prepared to keep negotiating over Russia's security demands in Eastern Europe, Mr. Peskov said, but added: "So far, we don't see and feel the readiness of our Western counterparts to take our concerns into account." The United States and NATO have flatly rejected Russian demands to cease the bloc's expansion into parts of Eastern Europe that Moscow considers part of its sphere of influence.

On Monday night, the Russian leader kept the West guessing at his intentions — refusing to rule out the possibility of invading Ukraine and warning of the possibility of a full-scale war between Russia and the West, while leaving the door open to further diplomacy. He said he would speak with Mr. Macron again by phone after the French president met with Mr. Zelensky.

But some analysts worry that Mr. Putin's engagement in diplomacy is merely buying time for Russia's military to make final preparations for an invasion.

On Tuesday, the Russian Defense Ministry said in a statement that six large landing craft from the Russian Navy's Baltic and Northern Fleets, capable of carrying thousands of troops, had been dispatched to the waters off Ukraine in the Black Sea, raising concerns that they could open a new vector of attack.

The statement said that the ships were scheduled to take part in planned military exercises. Military analysts, however, say that combining the ships with forces already deployed to the Black Sea region would provide a significant amphibious assault force capable of threatening a large area of the coastline of Ukraine, which has only a limited coastal defense system.

Russia's announcements of large-scale military drills in the region have prompted fears that they could be the pretext for an attack against Ukraine, which Russian forces invaded in 2014, annexing Crimea. In particular, the deployment of troops to Belarus, thousands of miles from their permanent bases, has been viewed as a threat against Kyiv, which is some 140 miles from the border with Belarus.

Speaking to reporters on the plane to Kyiv, Mr. Macron said that Mr. Putin had confirmed that he would withdraw troops from Belarus after the exercises, which are scheduled to conclude on Feb. 20, according to the Russian Defense Ministry. Mr. Peskov said that Mr. Putin did not give a date for their withdrawal, but added: "No one has ever said that Russian troops would stay in Belarus. This was never on the agenda."

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HEADLINE	02/08 Hong Kong toughest social-distance rules
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/world/asia/hong-kong-covid-social-distancing.html
GIST	<p>Hong Kong will institute its tightest social-distancing rules since the start of the pandemic to curb its largest coronavirus outbreak so far, as a wave of Omicron cases has raised questions about how long the city can continue its strict Covid-control policies.</p> <p>Hong Kong will require hair salons and places of worship to close for two weeks starting Thursday, and no more than two households will be allowed to meet in private, Carrie Lam, Hong Kong's chief executive, said on Tuesday. Public gatherings will be limited to two people.</p> <p>Shopping malls, grocery stores and markets will join the list of public places where visitors must register with an official contact tracing app. People visiting those sites, which include restaurants, will have to prove they have been vaccinated. Fines for not following mandatory testing orders will be doubled to nearly \$1,300.</p> <p>The city of 7.5 million has largely managed to avoid the worst of the pandemic, recording 213 Covid deaths over the past two years. But the spread of the highly transmissible Omicron variant since late December now threatens to overwhelm Hong Kong's aggressive contact tracing and quarantine efforts.</p>

	<p>Since last week it has set several daily highs for new case totals, with more than 600 added on Monday and again on Tuesday.</p> <p>The surging number of cases has forced the city to stop hospitalizing all Covid patients. On Tuesday it began sending some people with few or no symptoms to the government quarantine center at Penny's Bay. And some close contacts who were previously required to go to Penny's Bay will now be allowed to quarantine at home.</p> <p>Mrs. Lam has resisted suggestions that the latest wave of cases will force Hong Kong to abandon its strategy, which she calls "dynamic zero Covid."</p> <p>"In our fight against the epidemic we need to stand by a philosophy, otherwise we will see measures being change all the time," she said on Tuesday. "So at this moment, we will stand by the dynamic zero containment strategy."</p> <p>The risk to older people is of particular concern, Mrs. Lam said, because less than half the population over age 70 have been vaccinated. "The risk is increasing because there are more cases in residential homes and among their workers," she said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Antiwar alliance splinters over Ukraine
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/us/politics/russia-ukraine-veterans.html
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON — An antiwar alliance of veterans that emerged from the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan and spanned the political spectrum is splintering badly over the U.S. response to the threatening moves of President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia against Ukraine.</p> <p>The fracturing is more ideological than partisan: Some groups on the left that opposed the war in Afghanistan are siding with President Biden's deployment of thousands of troops to Eastern Europe, while other liberals are staunchly against it. Some conservative groups and lawmakers oppose the deployments, while others are pressing the president to go further, arguing that he has not been tough enough.</p> <p>The complex dynamics among veterans' groups that had been united just months ago reflected both general exhaustion with war among American voters and shifting domestic politics on the right and the left.</p> <p>Mr. Biden approved the deployment of 3,000 troops to NATO allies, including Poland and Romania, but said he did not intend to send troops to Ukraine, which is not a member of the alliance. The administration has also described a range of possible responses should Mr. Putin decide to invade Ukraine, including economic sanctions targeting Moscow.</p> <p>VoteVets, a left-leaning group that lobbied to end the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, quickly dispatched former generals to Capitol Hill to shore up Mr. Biden's position.</p> <p>Jon Soltz, the chairman of VoteVets, said people steadfast in their positions on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were struggling to justify their support for a muscular response to a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine. U.S. troop deployments can be seen as "a way to prevent war," he added, and even "those who are tied to the anti-forever-war dynamic" are having to adjust "to a different problem set."</p> <p>The group's strongest conservative partner in ending the "forever wars," Concerned Veterans for America, has taken a firm position against any American actions that could leave either Ukraine or Russia believing Washington has made a security commitment to Kyiv. The group opposes deploying troops to Eastern Europe and selling American weapons to Ukraine.</p> <p>Common Defense, a group that leans further left than VoteVets and also pressed for an end to the wars, has landed somewhere in the middle on Ukraine.</p>

“We certainly don’t want us to get involved, but if we have to would support the president,” said Naveed Shah, the group’s political director.

The ideological fragmentation is similar on Capitol Hill and among national security policy experts. Even conservatives who have traditionally hewed to a pro-democracy line have taken a position against what they call “expansionist foreign policy” in standing up to Russia now.

“This is definitely not a left-right thing,” said Emma Ashford, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and co-author of an article expressing opposition to American support of Ukraine, arguing that the United States is stretched too thin abroad.

“If you consider the broad swath of the restraint or antiwar movements, there are a lot of different groups under that umbrella,” she said. “The antiwar left says we should avoid conflict altogether, and we are saying the same thing, but for different reasons.”

For some groups aligned with Democrats, the motivations for supporting Mr. Biden are clear after four years of a president who admired Mr. Putin and was hostile to NATO.

“The progressive position here is to avoid war,” Mr. Soltz said, adding that “buzz words like ‘forever war’ don’t hold up when you talk about Putin. While the U.S. was playing games in the Middle East for 25 years, Russia was rebuilding its military.”

That is not a universally held position on the political left. Last month, Representative Pramila Jayapal, Democrat of Washington and the chairwoman of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, released a statement with Representative Barbara Lee, Democrat of California and a leading antiwar voice in her party, expressing worry that “new troop deployments, sweeping and indiscriminate sanctions and a flood of hundreds of millions of dollars in lethal weapons will only raise tensions and increase the chance of miscalculation.”

In a recent television interview, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, Democrat of New York, decried the “military industrial complex” and added: “I believe that the Biden administration is well within their right to counter Russia’s aggression diplomatically, but there is not a military solution to this problem.”

Other liberal-leaning veterans’ groups aligned with VoteVets on the wars against terrorism are concerned that helping Ukraine could lead to a military intervention and have pushed for diplomatic solutions.

“While Americans are concerned about Ukraine, poll after poll shows this sympathy doesn’t translate into support for any form of military intervention,” said Adam Weinstein, a research fellow at the Quincy Institute and a Marine veteran. “The incessant promise that the next military intervention is different has largely fallen on deaf ears among vets and outside the Beltway.”

On the Republican side, while there is significant support for Mr. Biden’s efforts, a populist strain is evident.

The Fox News host Tucker Carlson and Senator Josh Hawley, Republican of Missouri, have both suggested that the United States has no role to play in the fate of Ukraine. Former President Donald J. Trump said recently, “Before Joe Biden sends any troops to defend a border in Europe, he should be sending troops to defend our border right here in Texas,” a talking point that some other congressional Republicans appear to be grabbing as well.

But even among some Republican lawmakers less overtly aligned with Mr. Trump and his isolationist tendencies, the reception has been tepid. Senator Mike Braun, Republican of Indiana, for instance, has said that he is against sending more troops to Europe.

	<p>“The White House and many foreign policy commentators want to simply write it off as ‘Russian disinformation’ or Tucker’s affinity for Putin,” said Dan Caldwell, a senior adviser to Concerned Veterans for America. “But it is really another example of the shift in the larger foreign policy debate.”</p> <p>The Secure Families Initiative, which represents military families, expressed wariness of the United States “nearing another endless, unwinnable war,” according to a statement released in response to the developments in Eastern Europe.</p> <p>“We’ve focused on reinforcing the administration’s stated guardrails regarding these deployments,” said Sarah Streyder, the group’s executive director and an active-duty military spouse. “Any time troops deploy, it’s a potentially life-changing event for the military families back at home, and so we don’t take the decision lightly even if it turns out to be the most strategic choice.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Army unveils climate change priorities
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/8/world-edge-army-unveils-climate-change-priorities/
GIST	<p>The Army is rolling out its strategy to battle climate change, which Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin has called an “existential threat” to the nation’s security even as Russia continues massing heavily armed troops along its border with Ukraine.</p> <p>Pentagon officials blame changing world climate patterns in recent decades for worldwide drought, which directly contributes to food scarcity and instability in some of the world’s most volatile regions. They also insist it increases the risk to U.S. military personnel due to natural disasters and extreme weather.</p> <p>“The Army must adapt across our entire enterprise and purposefully pursue greenhouse gas mitigation strategies to reduce climate risks,” Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth said in a statement. “If we do not take action across, across our installations, acquisition and logistics and training, our option to mitigate these risks will become more constrained with each passing year.”</p> <p>Under the plan, the Army will achieve a 50% reduction in greenhouse gas pollution by 2030 and reach net-zero emission levels by 2050. Army leaders also will be expected to factor in climate change concerns while planning military strategies or logistics needs.</p> <p>Under the plan, the Army will field an all-electric non-tactical vehicle fleet by 2035.</p> <p>The Army annually purchases more than \$740 million worth of electricity from the national electric grid. In 2020, it added 4.1 million metric tons of carbon dioxide along with methane, nitrous oxide, and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, according to the service’s new strategy, officials said.</p> <p>The Army says it developed the climate strategy as a “roadmap of actions” that will enhance unit and installation readiness and resilience in the face of climate-related threats. Officials insist they can pursue greener practices in the ranks while retaining the military force to deter enemies and defend the U.S. and its allies abroad</p> <p>“The Army’s mission remains the same to fight and win this nation’s wars,” Paul Farnan, the Army’s acting assistant secretary for installations energy and environment, told Defense News in an interview this week, “and this strategy is actually going to enhance that ability to do so by increasing the capability of the force.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Russia fleet sails into the Black Sea
SOURCE	https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2022/feb/8/russian-fleet-sails-into-the-black-sea-amid-growin/
GIST	A task force of Russian amphibious assault ships is passing through the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles as it heads from the Mediterranean to the Black Sea for what officials in Moscow insist are “naval exercises.”

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HEADLINE	02/08 Macron late remarks set off alarm bells
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/08/emmanuel-macron-remark-russia-set-alarm-bell-ringing-ukraine-crisis-talk-vladimir-putin
GIST	<p>Domestic critics of Emmanuel Macron, Nato hardliners and the leadership in Ukraine will be suspiciously examining the French president’s late-night remarks at his Moscow press conference on Monday for signs of freelancing.</p> <p>At one level, Macron, three months from a re-election campaign, stuck pretty faithfully to the script he had exhaustively agreed with his Nato partners before his meeting with Vladimir Putin, but at another level his particular view of Russia as a European nation, and lofty talk of a new security guarantees, will have set alarm bells ringing.</p> <p>The specifics of the five hours of discussions between the French and Russian leaders, and points of convergence, were kept from the world at the press conference, but that did not stop Macron hinting at shifts in Nato’s outlook that some members say should never be made in response to military intimidation.</p> <p>The French president started by stressing the historically unacceptable presence of Russian troops on Ukraine’s borders. He also faithfully repeated the offers made by Nato and the US concerning mutual limitation of military deployments, more transparency for military activities or even a limitation of the deployment of short-range and intermediate missiles. He said in these areas Moscow and the west had the same demands. Moscow has already said it is ready to discuss these points but considers a commitment from Nato to cease all enlargement its primary demand.</p> <p>Here, Macron hinted at the need to acknowledge Russian concerns. He states: “There is no security for Europeans if there is no security for Russia”, a formulation of respect but one that also legitimises Moscow’s demands for a new security architecture based on the Russian concept of “indivisible security”. But what Macron meant was unclear.</p> <p>He said he firmly opposed repeating “the mistakes of the past about spheres of influence”, but then said “Russia is European. Whoever believes in Europe must know how to work with Russia and find the ways and the means to construct the European future among Europeans.”</p> <p>French officials at briefings spoke about the “Finlandisation” of Ukraine, a form of neutrality, an idea that has been floated before. Speaking in Ukraine on Tuesday, Macron denied that he had uttered the word either to journalists or political leaders.</p> <p>Finland, which shares a 830-mile (1,335km) border with Russia, chose in 1947 not to become a Nato member and signed a “friendship treaty” with Russia that included limits on the size of Finland’s</p>

army, and other restrictions on its sovereignty. The so-called Paasikivi doctrine – named after Juho Kusti Paasikivi, its president at the time – nevertheless created a political consensus in Finland until the issue was ironically reopened by the current Finnish president, Sauli Niinistö, concerned by what Russia was doing to threaten national sovereignty.

But there is a critical difference between Ukraine and Finland. Ukraine would in effect be required by outside powers to take up the status of a neutral state. Given Ukraine's stormy relationship with Russia, and the violence in the east of the country, it seems unlikely that Ukraine could ever be willing to become Finland 2. A lesser alternative would be that Ukraine's right to join the defence pact of its choice could be restated but in practice shelved.

Such a formulation could be squared by Macron's assertion at the press conference that a new security architecture in Europe should not be created by cancelling the right of states to join the Nato alliance.

Ukraine's possible Nato status is something of a mirage since the country is nowhere near the opening stages of Nato membership, and the discussion of the topic probably obscures the true point of conflict – Russia's desire to bring Ukraine not to a form of neutrality but back into its sphere of influence on the basis that the Kyiv government is illegitimate.

Macron's final proposal was "the strict and total" [implementation of the Minsk accord](#), the 2014-15 agreement that contains the groundwork for a final settlement in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, parts of which have been [under the control of pro-Russian separatists since April 2014](#). Since the separatists and Kyiv disagree on what Minsk requires, especially over sequencing, "strict implementation" clarifies only to the extent that it signals world powers are going to put renewed pressure on both sides to reach an agreement on the withdrawal of forces, free elections and the constitutional status for the rebel regions.

The Ukrainian foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, last week ruled out special status. Russia by contrast would like special status to include a veto over national foreign policy, something Kyiv would see only as a western-endorsed dismemberment of its country by force. But Macron at the least may try to pin the Ukrainian government to a set of steps on how local elections in Donbas and the withdrawal of forces could occur. But it is an issue that has frustrated diplomats since 2015.

Macron, as he himself concedes, may find it is not just Putin's absurdly large table that is keeping the west and Russia so far apart.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Spain ends mask mandate outdoors
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/spain-ends-mask-mandate-outdoors-coronavirus-surge-ebbs-82742689
GIST	<p>MADRID -- Spain is scrapping a mandate to wear masks outdoors, as COVID-19 infection rates drop and hospitals report lower admissions.</p> <p>Mask-wearing will not be necessary outside beginning Thursday, government spokeswoman Isabel Rodríguez said Tuesday after a weekly Cabinet meeting.</p> <p>The rule change includes children at school during their breaks outside between classes.</p> <p>However, masks remain mandatory in indoor public spaces, including public transportation, and when people are unable to keep a safe distance of 1.5 meters (4 feet) between them.</p> <p>The measure reverses a step taken last December amid an unprecedented surge of infections fueled by the highly contagious omicron variant.</p>

	<p>Official health ministry data showed how the spread of the virus gathered speed in November and peaked on Jan. 21 at 3,418 new infections per 100,000 residents over two weeks, a pandemic record. Contagion has since slowed down, with the 14-day figure dropping to just under 2,000.</p> <p>Authorities credit a strong vaccination rate of nearly 81% of Spain's 47 million people for a lower hospital admission rate of COVID-19 patients than in previous infection surges.</p> <p>Spain has officially recorded more than 94,000 deaths linked to COVID-19.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Education secretary: premature lift masks
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/education-secretary-miguel-cardona-warns-easing-mask-mandates/story?id=82749263
GIST	<p>A growing number of states are lifting mask mandates in schools, but Education Secretary Miguel Cardona says that prematurely easing restrictions could lead to more issues for in-person learning.</p> <p>"We have to have our health experts at the table," Cardona told ABC News Live on Tuesday. "Most importantly, we have to keep our schools open; our students cannot afford another round of disruption."</p> <p>New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy and Delaware Gov. John Carney announced Monday that students will no longer be required to wear a mask in schools by mid-March.</p> <p>Since a few months after the pandemic hit the United States, local politicians have come under pressure from parents and communities on both sides of the debate over children wearing masks in schools.</p> <p>"We have people that are very passionate about what they believe," Cardona said. "We have to remember to engage the perspectives of different parents, teachers."</p> <p>Cardona responded to claims of parents who argue that wearing a face mask negatively impacts their child's learning, by pointing to a likely outcome of lifting restrictions too soon.</p> <p>"You know what hinders kids' learning? Being quarantined because they have COVID, or not having a teacher because their teacher has COVID," he said.</p> <p>Some experts say it is too soon to end mask mandates in schools because vaccination rates are not high enough among children and new cases are still being reported. Experts are especially concerned for children under 5 who are not yet eligible for the vaccine. Pfizer requested emergency use authorization for children 6 months old to 5 years old on Feb. 1, and a Food and Drug Administration advisory meeting is scheduled for Feb. 15.</p> <p>"Many of our educators have children under the age of 5 that they go home to," said Cardona. "We need to make sure our schools are safe for them to work. We have to honor and respect our educators and leaders who have difficult decisions."</p> <p>The education secretary said the easing of coronavirus protocols in the classroom are making some educators feel uncomfortable coming to work. Since the pandemic began, there's been a teacher shortage, due to fears of contracting the virus, remote learning and an overall shift in how our nation's educators teach and interact with young people.</p> <p>"It's been tough to be an educator the last couple years, not only because of the changes that they've had to experience in terms of being in-person one day and being fully remote the next, but they've been under a lot of pressure," said Cardona. "There's strong feelings in the community, oftentimes teachers are being blamed schools are not open."</p>

	<p>He noted that the country has made progress in keeping schools open throughout the last year, stating that in the beginning of President Joe Biden's term, less than 50% of classes were held in person. Now, all schools have opened their doors, though some are still operating on a hybrid schedule.</p> <p>Cardona said it's important for school districts and politicians to remember what has succeeded in keeping students and educators safe in schools.</p> <p>"What I'm hearing from educators is that they just want to make sure that their work environment is safe for their students," he added. "But they also understand this pandemic has taken a toll and that we're ready to move forward, but we can only do so if we protect our students and our staff, including the students who are not yet in our schools, the little ones that parents are going back home to."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Covid wave batters Afghanistan health care
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/covid-wave-batters-afghanistans-crumbling-health-care-82764720
GIST	<p>KABUL, Afghanistan -- Only five hospitals in Afghanistan still offer COVID-19 treatment, with 33 others having been forced to close in recent months for lack of doctors, medicines and even heat. This comes as the economically devastated nation is hit by a steep rise in the number of reported coronavirus cases.</p> <p>At Kabul's only COVID-19 treatment hospital, staff can only heat the building at night because of lack of fuel, even as winter temperatures drop below freezing during the day. Patients are bundled under heavy blankets. Its director, Dr. Mohammed Gul Liwal, said they need everything from oxygen to medicine supplies.</p> <p>The facility, called the Afghan Japan Communicable Disease Hospital, has 100 beds. The COVID-19 ward is almost always full as the virus rages. Before late January, the hospital was getting one or two new coronavirus patients a day. In the past two weeks, 10 to 12 new patients have been admitted daily, Liwal said.</p> <p>"The situation is worsening day by day," said Liwal, speaking inside a chilly conference room. Since the Taliban takeover almost six months ago, hospital employees have received only one month's salary, in December.</p> <p>Afghanistan's health care system, which survived for nearly two decades almost entirely on international donor funding, has been devastated since the Taliban returned to power in August following the chaotic end to the 20-year U.S.-led intervention. Afghanistan's economy crashed after nearly \$10 billion in assets abroad were frozen and financial aid to the government was largely halted.</p> <p>The health system collapse has only worsened the humanitarian crisis in the country. Roughly 90% of the population has fallen below the poverty level, and with families barely able to afford food, at least a million children are threatened with starvation.</p> <p>The omicron variant is hitting Afghanistan hard, Liwal said, but he admits it is just a guess because the country is still waiting for kits that test specifically for the variant. They were supposed to arrive before the end of last month, said Public Health Ministry spokesman Dr. Javid Hazhir. ' The World Health Organization now says Afghanistan will get the kits by the end of February.</p> <p>The organization says that between Jan. 30 and Feb. 5, public laboratories in Afghanistan tested 8,496 samples, of which nearly half, were positive for COVID-19. Those numbers translate into a 47. 4% positivity rate, the world health body said.</p> <p>As of Tuesday, the WHO recorded 7,442 deaths and close to 167,000 infections since the start of the pandemic almost two years ago. In the absence of large-scale testing, these relatively low figures are believed to be a result of extreme under-reporting.</p>

Meanwhile, the new Taliban administration says it is trying to push vaccines on a skeptical population that often sees them as dangerous.

With 3.2 million vaccine doses in stock, Hazhir said the administration has launched a campaign through mosques, clerics and mobile vaccine clinics to get more people vaccinated. Currently barely 27% of Afghanistan's 38 million people have been vaccinated, most with the single-dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine.

Getting Afghans to follow even a minimum of safety protocols, like mask wearing and social distancing, has been near impossible, Liwal said. For many struggling to feed their families, COVID-19 ranks low on their list of fears, he said. The Public Health Ministry has run awareness campaigns about the value of masks and social distancing, but most people aren't listening.

Even in the Afghan Japan hospital, where signs warn people that mask wearing is mandatory, most people in the dimly lit halls were without masks. In the intensive care unit, where half of the 10 patients in the ward were on ventilators, doctors and attendants wore only surgical masks and gowns for protection as they moved from bed to bed.

The head of the unit, Dr. Naeemullah, said he needs more ventilators and, even more urgently, he needs doctors trained on using ventilators. He is overstretched and rarely paid, but feels duty-bound to serve his patients. Liwal said several doctors have left Afghanistan.

Most of the hospital's 200 employees come to work regularly despite months without pay.

In December, a U.S.-based charity affiliated with Johns Hopkins University provided two months funding, which gave the hospital staff their December salary and a promise of another paycheck in January. The public health ministry is now in negotiations with the WHO to take over the cost of running the hospital through June, said Liwal.

Liwal said other Kabul hospitals used to be able to take some patients, but now no longer have the resources. With a lack of funds and staff leaving, 33 facilities offering COVID-19 treatment nationwide have shut down, he said.

The Afghan Japan hospital's only microbiologist, Dr. Faridullah Qazizada, earned less than \$1,000 a month before the Taliban took power. He has received only one month's salary since August, he said. He says his equipment and facilities are barely adequate.

"The whole health system has been destroyed," he said.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Hospitals begin to limp out of latest surge
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/hospitals-begin-limp-latest-covid-19-surge-82753475
GIST	<p>As omicron numbers drop at Denver Health, Dr. Anuj Mehta is reminded of the scene in the 1980 comedy "The Blues Brothers" when John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd pile out of a battered car after a police chase.</p> <p>Suddenly, all the doors pop off the hinges, the front wheels fall off and smoke pours from the engine.</p> <p>"And that's my fear," said Mehta, a pulmonary and critical care physician. "I'm worried that as soon as we stop, everything's just going to fall apart."</p> <p>Across the U.S., the number of people in the hospital with COVID-19 has tumbled more than 28% over the past three weeks to about 105,000 on average, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.</p>

But the ebbing of the omicron surge has left in its wake postponed surgeries, exhausted staff members and uncertainty over whether this is the last big wave or whether another one lies ahead.

“What we want to see is that the omicron surge continues to decrease, that we don’t see another variant of concern emerge, that we start to come out of the other side of this,” said Dr. Chris Beyrer, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

But he added: “We’ve been proven wrong twice already, with delta and omicron. So that adds to people’s anxiety and uncertainty and sense of like ‘When does this end?’”

Another reason for anxiety: COVID-19 hospitalizations aren't even all that low. They are at a level seen in January 2021, amid last winter's surge.

Hospitals limped through the omicron surge with workforces that already were depleted after many staff members quit the profession. The remaining health care workers got sick in droves. In some hospitals, office staff was assigned to help make beds.

Now, many hospitals are still in crisis mode, as they work to reschedule people whose hip replacements and even cancer and brain surgeries were put off during the omicron crisis to free up bed space and nurses to care for COVID-19 patients.

Even in North Dakota, which has consistently ranked near the top in the number of COVID-19 cases relative to the population, hospitals have seen a dramatic drop in virus patients. However, executives at Dakotas-based Sanford Health said their hospitals are still full.

“We’ve been running hard for a couple years here now, but I am not sure that I sense relief,” said Dr. Doug Griffin, a vice president and medical officer for Sanford in Fargo, North Dakota. “Most of our caregivers are giving care to other patients. We still have some very, very sick people coming in for all sorts of reasons.”

At the Cleveland Clinic’s 13 Ohio hospitals, the number of patients with COVID-19 has fallen to 280, down from an all-time pandemic high of around 1,200. Surgeries began to be delayed at the end of December, and the situation is just now returning to normal, said Dr. Raed Dweik, head of the system's respiratory institute.

The hope, he said, is that this is the last big surge and that the hospitals can begin to catch up.

“We’ve had our hopes dashed before that. ‘Oh, this is the end of the pandemic and this virus,’” he said. “Every time we we say something like this, it’s kind of laughed at us, and it comes back with a new variant.”

Dr. Craig Spencer, a New York City emergency room physician, tweeted a week ago: “Just worked 12 hours in the ER on a busy Monday and didn’t have a single Covid patient. Not one. This ain’t over. But it’s a helluva lot better than even just a few weeks ago.”

Spencer said Tuesday that he had another COVID-free shift during the overnight hours Friday and Saturday.

“I am getting a somewhat random sample, of course, but just compared to a month ago, it’s a complete sea change, which is great,” he said.

Mary Turner, who is president of the Minnesota Nurses Association and works as a COVID-19 ICU nurse, said patient numbers remain high because “of all the other people who didn’t go to their appointments or their follow-ups who are coming in with all the other conditions.”

	<p>If there is any relief, Turner said, it's being able to walk into a patient's room without having to wear full protective gear.</p> <p>"It's like heaven" to walk in and just don a pair of gloves, she said.</p> <p>At the eight-hospital Beaumont Health system in Michigan, the number of COVID-19 patients fell to 250 on Tuesday, down from last month's omicron peak of 851.</p> <p>Dr. Justin Skrzynski, an internal medicine physician who runs a COVID-19 floor at Beaumont Health's hospital in Royal Oak, said patient care is about 90% back to normal and he finds reason for optimism, noting that the combination of vaccinations and immunity from infections should provide some protection.</p> <p>But he noted: "I think there needs to be a lot of awareness of how much a lot of health care has degenerated."</p> <p>He said nurses subjected to abuse from patients have left the profession in large numbers. Costs have risen.</p> <p>"Right now, there's so much that we're doing to prop up the health care system financially," he said, noting the billions of dollars that the federal stimulus package provided to help hospitals deal with the pandemic. "Unfortunately, once the dust settles, I think all these things are going to come due."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Canada protests threaten border trade
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/canadas-covid-19-protests-threaten-border-trade-us-82749571
GIST	<p>OTTAWA, Ontario -- Canadian lawmakers expressed increasing worry Tuesday about the economic effects of disruptive demonstrations after the busiest border crossing between the U.S. and Canada became partially blocked by truckers protesting vaccine mandates and other COVID-19 restrictions.</p> <p>The blockade at the Ambassador Bridge between Detroit and Windsor, Ontario, prevented traffic from entering Canada while some U.S.-bound traffic was still moving, Public Safety Minister Marco Mendicino said, calling the bridge "one of the most important border crossings in the world." It carries 25% of all trade between Canada and the United States.</p> <p>Canadian Transport Minister Omar Alghabra said such blockades will have serious implications on the economy and supply chains. "I've already heard from automakers and food grocers. This is really a serious cause for concern," he said in Ottawa, the capital.</p> <p>Added Mendicino: "Most Canadians understand there is a difference between being tired and fatigued with the pandemic and crossing into some other universe."</p> <p>Speaking in an emergency debate late Monday in Parliament, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said the protesters are "trying to blockade our economy, our democracy."</p> <p>Auto parts and other goods were still flowing across the border Tuesday evening, despite the bridge delays. But trucks had to travel almost 70 miles north to the Blue Water Bridge connecting Sarnia, Ontario, to Port Huron, Michigan. Authorities at that bridge reported a nearly three-hour delay for trucks to cross. In total, the trip will take more than five hours longer than normal.</p> <p>Flavio Volpe, president of the Canadian Auto Parts Manufacturers Association, said the protesters have no right to park vehicles in the middle of roads. He questioned how many of the protesters were truckers because trucker associations and large logistics companies have disavowed the blockades.</p> <p>"It is really a collection of kind of anti-government provocateurs," he said.</p>

The protests also threaten supplies of fresh produce, livestock and other food, Volpe said.

Even a five-hour delay can cause production disruptions because factories are running so lean on part supplies with an already fragile supply chain, said Jeff Schuster, president of the LMC Automotive consulting firm in Troy, Michigan.

“Everything is so ‘just-in-time’ these days,” he said. “We’re still dealing with parts shortages in general and supply chain issues. This is just another wrench in the industry that we’re dealing with right now.”

Protesters also closed another important U.S.-Canada border crossing in Coutts, Alberta.

The daily demonstrations staged by the so-called Freedom Truck Convoy are centered in Ottawa, where demonstrators have used hundreds of parked trucks to paralyze parts of the capital for more than 10 days. Protesters have said they will not leave until all vaccine mandates and COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

Protest organizers have been calling for weeks for the removal of Trudeau’s government, although most of the restrictive measures were put in place by provincial governments.

On Tuesday, the organizers withdrew an unlawful demand that the nation’s governor general, the representative of Britain’s Queen Elizabeth II as head of state, force federal and provincial governments to lift all COVID-19 restrictions, including vaccine mandates. They now say they support Canada’s constitution and the democratic process.

François Laporte, the president of Teamsters Canada, which represents over 55,000 drivers, including 15,000 long-haul truckers, said the protests do not represent the industry in which 90% of drivers are vaccinated.

The Freedom Convoy “and the despicable display of hate led by the political Right and shamefully encouraged by elected conservative politicians does not reflect the values of Teamsters Canada, nor the vast majority of our members,” Laporte said in a statement.

Canada’s largest trucking company is virtually untouched by the vaccine mandate for truckers crossing the U.S.-Canada border, said Alain Bédard, chairman and CEO of TFI International Inc.

“Vaccination at TFI is not an issue at all,” he said. The company’s few unvaccinated drivers are kept in Canada.

The protests have also infuriated people who live around downtown Ottawa, including neighborhoods near Parliament Hill, the seat of the federal government.

Dave Weatherall, a federal civil servant, lives near the truckers’ prime staging area in a city-owned parking lot outside of the downtown core. “They’re using the lot to terrorize people,” he said.

“It’s the first time since having kids that I’ve seriously wondered about the world we brought them into. I always figured they could handle most things the world will throw at them, but this feels different,” he added.

Ottawa’s city manager said all tow-truck companies on contract with the city have refused to haul away the big rigs.

Joel Lightbound, a lawmaker for Trudeau’s Liberal Party, rebuked his leader Tuesday for dividing Canadians and said his government needs to create a road map for when coronavirus measures should be lifted.

“It is time we stopped dividing people, to stop pitting one part of the population against each other,” Lightbound said.

	<p>Trudeau said everyone is tired of COVID-19, and that the restrictions will not last forever. He noted that Canada has one of the highest vaccination rates in the world.</p> <p>“This government has been focused every step of the way on following the best science, the best public health advice, to keep as many people as safe as possible. Frankly, it’s worked,” Trudeau said Tuesday.</p> <p>Pandemic restrictions have been far stricter in Canada than in the U.S., but Canadians have largely supported the measures. Canada’s death rate is one third that of its neighbor.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the Canadian provinces of Saskatchewan, Quebec, Alberta and Prince Edward Island announced plans to lift some or all COVID-19 restrictions, with Alberta removing its vaccine passport almost immediately. A week ago, Alberta’s premier said the vaccine passport could be eliminated by the end of March.</p> <p>Quebec’s plan doesn’t include an end to mask mandates or the vaccine passport system.</p> <p>Quebec Premier Francois Legault said the demonstrators who descended on Quebec City last weekend calling for an end to health measures didn’t weigh on the government’s decision to offer Quebecers a reopening plan.</p> <p>“Now, if they (demonstrators) want to take credit for this, and then they don’t come back in two weeks, I won’t object to that,” Legault said.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Australia, Lithuania unite against China
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/australia-lithuania-unite-chinese-economic-coercion-82763018
GIST	<p>CANBERRA, Australia -- The foreign ministers of Australia and Lithuania agreed Wednesday to step up cooperation on strategic challenges, in particular pressures from China.</p> <p>Lithuania’s Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis and his Australian counterpart Marise Payne met Wednesday at Parliament House.</p> <p>Australian exporters have lost tens of billions of dollars to official and unofficial Chinese trade barriers covering coal, wine, beef, crayfish and barley that have coincided with deteriorating relations with Beijing.</p> <p>Lithuania, a country of 2.8 million in the Baltic region, more recently drew Beijing’s ire after breaking with diplomatic custom by agreeing that Taiwan’s office in its capital Vilnius would bear the name Taiwan instead of Chinese Taipei, a term used by other countries to avoid offending Beijing.</p> <p>“For quite a while, Australia was probably one of the main examples where China is using economy and trade as a political instrument or, one might say, even as a political weapon,” Landsbergis said.</p> <p>“Now Lithuania joins this exclusive club . . . but it is apparent that we’re definitely not the last ones,” he added.</p> <p>Payne said she agreed with Landsbergis on the importance of like-minded countries working together with a consistent approach to maintaining the international rules-based order, free and open trade, transparency, security and stability.</p> <p>“There are many colleagues with whom the foreign minister (Landsbergis) and I work and engage on these issues . . . the more I think we are sending the strongest possible message about our rejection of coercion and our rejection of authoritarianism,” Payne said.</p>

	<p>Landsbergis welcomed Australia to World Trade Organization consultations over a complaint by the European Union accusing Beijing of holding up goods — both from member nation Lithuania and from EU companies that use Lithuanian components — at China’s borders.</p> <p>“We need to remind countries like China or any other country that would wish to use trade as a weapon that like-minded countries across the globe . . . have tools and regulations that help withstand the coercion and not to give in to . . . political and economic pressures,” Landsbergis said.</p> <p>Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Tuesday that China was adhering to WTO rules in its dealings with Lithuania.</p> <p>“The so-called ‘coercion’ of China against Lithuania is purely made out of thin air,” he said Tuesday.</p> <p>“China urges Lithuania to face up to the objective facts, mend its ways and come back to the right track of adhering to the one-China principle. It should stop confounding right with wrong and maliciously hyping things up, let alone trying to rope other countries in to gang up on China,” Zhao said.</p> <p>The one-China principle holds that Taiwan is part of China and the Communist government in Beijing is China’s sole legitimate government.</p> <p>Lithuania's first embassy in the 31-year history of bilateral ties opened in Canberra on Wednesday. Lithuania also offered support for Australia reaching a free trade deal with the EU. Australia plans to open a trade office in Lithuania soon.</p> <p>Landsbergis said disruptions by China and Russia of the “global rules-based order” required an international response. “We have to act counter-disruptively. That means reassuring and strengthening our ties and, actually, this rules-based order that provides security for some of us and prosperity also for the others,” he added.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Israel retaliates attack, strikes Syria
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/israel-hits-syrian-targets-anti-aircraft-missile-fire-82758878
GIST	<p>JERUSALEM -- A Syrian soldier was killed and five others were wounded in an Israeli attack near the capital Damascus, Syrian state media said. The Israeli military said it attacked targets in Syria shortly after an anti-aircraft missile was fired from the Arab country into northern Israel early Wednesday.</p> <p>Israel said the Syrian rocket exploded in the air and was not intercepted by Israeli air defenses, but it activated warning sirens in northern Israel. There were no reports of injuries or damage there.</p> <p>In a rare statement acknowledging attacks inside Syria, the Israeli army said it struck Syrian facilities used in targeting Israeli aircraft, including a radar and anti-aircraft batteries.</p> <p>Syrian official news agency SANA reported that Israel fired surface-to-surface missiles in the vicinity of the capital city Damascus and some of them were brought down by air defenses. It said a Syrian soldier was killed in the attack, which caused material damage, and five soldiers were wounded.</p> <p>Israel has made hundreds of strikes on targets inside government-controlled parts of Syria over the past decade of the civil war in the Arab country, but its government rarely acknowledges or discusses such operations.</p> <p>Israel has acknowledged, however, that it is targeting bases of Iran-allied militias, such as Hezbollah, which is fighting on the side of Syrian President Bashar Assad’s forces in the country’s civil strife.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Park outside: Hyundai, Kia recall vehicles
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SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/park-hyundai-kia-recall-vehicles-due-fire-risk-82740515
GIST	<p>DETROIT -- Hyundai and Kia are telling the owners of nearly 485,000 vehicles in the U.S. to park them outdoors because they can catch fire even if the engines have been turned off.</p> <p>The recalls from the two Korean automakers are another in a long string of fire and engine failure problems that have dogged the companies for the past six years.</p> <p>This time the problem is contamination in the antilock brake control module that can cause an electrical short. This increases the risk of fire while the vehicles are being driven or are parked.</p> <p>Affected are certain Kia Sportage SUVs from 2014 through 2016, and the 2016 through 2018 K900 sedan. Recalled Hyundais include certain 2016 through 2018 Santa Fe SUVs, 2017 and 2018 Santa Fe Sports, the 2019 Santa Fe XL and 2014 and 2015 Tucson SUVs.</p> <p>The automakers say they have 11 reports of fires in the U.S. but no injuries.</p> <p>Documents posted Tuesday by U.S. safety regulators say owners should park the vehicles outside and away from structures until repairs are made.</p> <p>Dealers will replace a fuse. In addition, Hyundai dealers will inspect the control modules and replace them if needed. Hyundai will mail notification letters starting April 5, and Kia will send them March 31.</p> <p>The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration says owners can go www.nhtsa.gov and enter their 17-digit vehicle identification number to see if their automobile is being recalled.</p> <p>Hyundai said that when it finds a safety defect “we act swiftly and efficiently to recall the vehicle and fix the problem at no cost to affected customers.”</p> <p>Kia said there are warning signs that drivers could see or smell. The antilock brake warning light could come on, and they could smell something burning or melting, or see smoke coming from the engine compartment.</p> <p>Tuesday's recalls come after U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration stepped up a series of investigations into engine compartment fires that have plagued the Korean automakers.</p> <p>In December, the agency consolidated two investigations from 2017 into a new a new engineering analysis covering more than 3 million vehicles from the 2011 through 2016 model years. At the time, NHTSA had received 161 complaints of engine fires, some of which occurred in vehicles that had already been recalled.</p> <p>The first recall from the companies related to engine failures and fires reaches to September 2015. Since then they have issued at least eight more recalls for a host of engine problems, according to NHTSA documents.</p> <p>The agency said it’s evaluating whether previous recalls covered enough vehicles. It also will monitor the effectiveness of previous recalls “as well as the long-term viability of related programs and non-safety field actions being conducted by Hyundai and Kia.”</p> <p>At the time, the automakers said they have undertaken numerous recalls to address engine issues, including recalls, new engine monitoring technology and providing extended warranties.</p> <p>Michael Brooks, chief counsel for the nonprofit Center for Auto Safety, said the recalls Tuesday are different from the engine failure problem that caused most of the previous Hyundai-Kia fire recalls. “Although NHTSA has the authority to order a recall and potentially a buyback of all affected vehicles, the separate fire defects that have plagued millions of Hyundai vehicles across multiple model years makes this a very difficult task,” he said.</p>

	<p>In November of 2020, NHTSA announced that Kia and Hyundai must pay \$137 million in fines and for safety improvements because they moved too slowly to recall more than 1 million vehicles with engines that can fail. The fines resolved a previous probe into the companies' behavior involving recalls of multiple models dating to the 2011 model year.</p> <p>Kia was to pay \$27 million and invest \$16 million in safety performance measures. Another \$27 million payment will be deferred as long as Kia meets safety conditions, NHTSA said.</p> <p>Kia denied the U.S. allegations but said it wanted to avoid a protracted legal fight.</p> <p>Data collected by the Center for Auto Safety show more than 30 U.S. fire and engine-related recalls from Hyundai and Kia since 2015. The recalls involve more than 20 models from the 2006 through 2021 model years totaling over 8.4 million vehicles.</p> <p>Many of the recalls involved manufacturing defects that stopped oil from flowing through the engine block. Many involved expensive engine replacements.</p> <p>Hyundai and Kia also did a U.S. "product improvement campaign" covering 3.7 million vehicles to install software that will alert drivers of possible engine failures.</p>
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Cyber Awareness

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HEADLINE	02/08 Texas hack changed ransomware business
SOURCE	https://therecord.media/how-a-texas-hack-changed-the-ransomware-business-forever/
GIST	<p>The early morning hours of August 16, 2019 began with the whirring and burping sound of computer printers. The scratch and screech echoed along the empty corridors of the Borger, Tex. administrative offices, paper sliding from tray to ink jet to tray and then back again.</p> <p>Anyone in the office that steamy Friday who happened to glance at the finished pages would have seen sheets covered in gibberish: all ampersands, exclamation points and broken English.</p> <p>To Jason Whisler, the city's emergency management coordinator, it was clear what this meant: Borger, population 13,000, was suffering from a ransomware attack and those pages on the printers were filled with demands. "If you read between the lines it basically said, you know, the system's been infected," Whisler recalled. "It was a very definite pay up or else."</p> <p>Borger wasn't alone; it was one of nearly two dozen cities around the state that woke up that morning to find computers either locked up or misbehaving. They would learn much later that hackers had managed to infiltrate their managed service provider, the company that was handling their IT, and by cracking into the MSP they had their pick of dozens of victims – it was very efficient. And all the cyber criminals wanted to make it stop was \$2.5 million in Bitcoin.</p> <p>"The city manager at the time, he asked me, 'I have to ask because insurance is asking, do we want to consider paying the ransom?'" Whisler said. "Immediately I said no." In his view, it was tantamount to negotiating with terrorists.</p> <p>The decision not to pay had a surprising knock-on effect: it forced a notorious ransomware gang, the Russia-based REvil, or ransomware evil, to rethink how it did business. What it came up with – something called ransomware-as-a-service – is a big part of the reason why ransomware is one of the fastest-growing cybersecurity threats in the world today.</p>

Ransomware-as-a-service, or RaaS, is a franchise model. Instead of launching a ransomware attack from beginning to end, cybercriminals have started to divvy up the work. In REvil's case, it decided to give the time-consuming, front-end reconnaissance work of a hack to other groups: they could unearth vulnerabilities that compromise networks, and REvil would handle everything necessary for the ransomware operation itself from malware packages to negotiators to Bitcoin wallets waiting for payments. For their services, REvil would get a percentage of any ransom money paid.

In an interview published by The Record last year, one REvil manager claimed that the group had developed a coterie of more than 60 affiliates all of whom were launching cyber attacks. So instead of one group holding a couple dozen servers ransom as had happened in the past, there were dozens of groups working simultaneously to lock up tens of thousands of them.

Ransomware evil

About a year before the Texas attack, a managed service provider named Certified CIO discovered it had been compromised. Hackers had infiltrated its client networks and were beginning to take control of their servers in order to hold them for ransom.

"We got called out because they just happened to be local enough to us that we could make the trip and sit alongside an incident response firm," said Kyle Hanslovan, the CEO of Huntress, a cyber security firm. "And during the process, we realized that the actor got into the remote management software" of the MSP.

It so happens that a videofeed the company had set up to record their help sessions with clients had accidentally captured the bad guys at work. So Hanslovan and his team suddenly had hours and hours of what was essentially cyber surveillance footage. They could see the hackers methodically working their way through the client networks – turning off virus scanners, encrypting each host and stealing their passwords.

"You could actually see them on screen," Hanslovan said. "What's funny is the naming schemes to the tactics, to the capabilities, to what they checked and what did they do after they got initial access" all provided incredible insight into how the group ran their intrusions and Hanslovan came to believe that a group he'd had an eye on for years, a group that would eventually become REvil, was behind it all.

"My first run-ins with REvil were probably well before they ever called themselves REvil, is probably like 2017. Maybe even as early as 2016," he said, adding that he recognized them because they loved to target MSPs like Hanslovan's client, Certified CIO.

The gang, it turns out, were particularly good at finding vulnerabilities in MSP software and at the time they were the only ones that appeared to be doing it. When Hanslovan heard about what happened in Texas, he was pretty sure REvil, the group he had studied for years, was behind that, too.

Manager: Unknown

Last year, a security analyst named Dmitry Smilyanets had a long online chat with someone who claimed to be a member of REvil's management team. He went by the online handle 'Unknown.'

"Unknown was not a hacker. He was the operator. He was the manager," Smilyanets said. "His job was to control the infrastructure, make sure it all works. Make sure that communication lines with victims were up and that payments go through."

Smilyanets didn't just take Unknown's word for it. He had been watching the REvil manager for some time, tracking his message traffic on the dark web, watching as his online wallet swelled with Bitcoin, and Smilyanets eventually became convinced that Unknown was who he claimed to be. (Smilyanets works at Recorded Future, a threat intelligence company. [Click Here](#) and The Record are divisions of Recorded Future and are editorially independent.)

While it is impossible to verify all the claims Unknown made in his chat with Smilyanets, he did make clear that after 2019, REvil did some rethinking. “Their main goal is to make money and they will not stop on anything until they make this money,” Smilyanets said. “They bring new tactics, new techniques to help to pressure the victim to pay.”

Ransomware-as-a-service was one of those new techniques. RaaS was not just more efficient, it provided a level of deniability. Security analysts and law enforcement might spot REvil’s code in the ransomware, but because of the new business model, they couldn’t be sure if REvil was actually behind it. What’s more, because REvil was cycling through various affiliate groups it complicated attempts at attribution. According to the Justice Department since 2019, REvil has been linked to some 175,000 ransomware attacks, generating some \$200 million in ransom.

“We kind of slept”

For Whisler and Garrett Spradling, Borger’s city manager, the events of 2019 never became a whodunnit. Their singular focus was on getting the city’s computers running again. “I’ve got enough to deal with the day-to-day business in the city of Borger,” Spradling said. “I mean, as bad as it may or may not sound, I didn’t even think about the other cities. I have enough to worry about with my city.”

So the fact that REvil was involved seemed at the time, and even now, beside the point. Chasing cybercriminals was left to others: federal law enforcement, including the FBI and, sometimes, the NSA.

Before Texas, the people behind epic hacks tended to be nation-state actors. The North Koreans broke into Sony Pictures in 2014; the Chinese stole millions of secret personnel files from the Office of Personnel Management a year later. Those kinds were America’s main adversaries in cyberspace and they were known as APTs – Advanced Persistent Threats and in attacks against the U.S. they were usually from one of the Big Four: Russia, China, North Korea or Iran.

Kyle Hanslovan used to work at the NSA and he said the focus inside Fort Meade, where the NSA and Cybercom fight these kinds of threats, was almost exclusively on the nation-state variety.

“‘Let’s go after the ATP’ was what it was all about back then,” he said. And because there was such a focus on those actors, Hanslovan believes “we kind of slept” through an important shift: in 2015 or 2016, criminals were starting to weaponize cyberspace too. “We were late behind the power curve on all of ransomware-as-a-service,” Hanslovan said.

The criminal element started slow, with something called initial access brokers – just run-of-the-mill hackers who found vulnerabilities in random computers and bundled them together. “Initial access brokers would get people who have all these unimportant accesses to computers and bundle them together, and resell them for dirt cheap,” said Hanslovan. “We’re talking about sometimes as cheap as \$10 for access.”

The buyers would root around the various access points to see where it might take them. Could a small vulnerability on one computer, for example, allow them to monkey bar over to something else – like a company email system or a company network? If that happened, they figured out that that access they bought for \$10 could now be sold for \$100 – maybe even \$1,000..

It was a service model.

“You could have looked circa 2018 and seen that this behavior was going to happen,” Hanslovan said. “It just made economical sense. It’s the same reason, again, that you have somebody delivering your paper for the last mile. It just makes so much sense to have a one-to-many relationship, but we were kind of very slow as a [cybersecurity] culture to react to it.”

A \$44,000 bill

Borger might have emerged from that 2019 attack as just another victim had they not been in the middle of upgrading their servers. It happened to have been in the middle of transferring its data over to a new City Hall server that August. Then Mother Nature lent a hand.

“By luck, we had a faulty ups with that server,” Whisler said. “And a couple of nights before we had some storms roll through and when the power flickered that server shut down and was also offline. So even though a lot of our individual desktops were affected by this through the network, the lion’s share of our data that we need for just city operations, utility billing, that was actually preserved on a server that had shut down.”

Spradling, the city manager, said that and a couple of other happy accidents meant that the ransomware attack was scary, but in the end not all that costly. To make everything right again ran the city about \$44,000, he said, which wasn’t even half the city’s general contingency funding. The State of Texas helped them too. Officials talked to some of the computer companies, explained what happened, and the companies gave Borger a huge discount on new computers Whisler said they needed to upgrade anyway.

“It’s satisfying that they didn’t get anything,” he said. “Our overall expenses are our losses and the replacement was mitigated by the state and we didn’t pay any of the ransom. So all in all, I would call it a successful failure.”

In its own way, REvil probably saw it that way too until back in October when their luck seemed to run out: U.S. Cyber Command and the NSA launched an offensive cyber operation against REvil, Reuters reported. They took over their server and redirected all their traffic, basically shuttering their RaaS ransomware operation.

A few months later, Moscow fired its own salvo. It released a video of authorities raiding the homes of more than a dozen alleged REvil members. Moscow said afterward it arrested REvil members as a favor to President Biden.

As for the REvil manager, Unknown, he has been missing for months. “He’s disappeared,” Smilyanets said.

And at least for now, REvil has too.

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HEADLINE	02/09 Lazarus hackers behind fake job offers
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/lazarus-hackers-target-defense-industry-with-fake-lockheed-martin-job-offers/
GIST	<p>Lazarus has been tied to a new campaign attacking hopeful job applicants in the defense industry.</p> <p>The advanced persistent threat (APT) group has been impersonating Lockheed Martin in the latest operation. The Bethesda, Maryland-based company is involved in aeronautics, military technology, mission systems, and space exploration.</p> <p>Lockheed Martin generated \$65.4 billion in sales in 2020 and has approximately 114,000 employees worldwide.</p> <p>Lazarus is a state-sponsored hacking group with ties to North Korea. The prolific and sophisticated group is generally financially-motivated and is believed to be responsible for serious attacks in the past beginning with the WannaCry ransomware outbreak, as well as the \$80 million heist against Bangladeshi Bank, assaults against freight companies, and South Korean supply chains.</p> <p>On February 8, Qualys Senior Engineer of Threat Research Akshat Pradhan revealed a new campaign using Lockheed Martin's name to attack job applicants.</p> <p>In a similar way to past activities that abused the reputation of Northrop Grumman and BAE Systems, Lazarus is sending targets phishing documents pretending to offer employment opportunities.</p>

Return to Top	<p>The documents, named <i>Lockheed_Martin_JobOpportunities.docx</i> and <i>Salary_Lockheed_Martin_job_opportunities_confidential.doc</i>, contain malicious macros which trigger shellcode to hijack control flow, retrieve decoy documents, and create Scheduled tasks for persistence.</p> <p>Living Off the Land Binaries (LOLBins) are also abused to further the compromise of the target machine. However, when the malicious scripts attempted to pull in a further payload, an error was returned -- and so Qualys can't be sure what the final malware package was meant to achieve.</p> <p>"We attribute this campaign to Lazarus as there is significant overlap in the macro content, campaign flow, and phishing themes of our identified variants as well as older variants that have been attributed to Lazarus by other vendors," Pradhan says.</p> <p>This isn't the first time Lazarus has exploited job candidates or vacancies. F-Secure has previously found samples of phishing emails, masquerading as job offers, that were sent to a system administrator belonging to a targeted cryptocurrency organization.</p> <p>In related research, Outpost24's Blueliv cybersecurity team has named Lazarus, Cobalt, and FIN7 as the most prevalent threat groups targeting the financial industry today.</p> <p>ZDNet has reached out to Lockheed Martin and we will update when we hear back.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/09 FBI: SIM-swapping attacks skyrocketing
SOURCE	https://www.zdnet.com/article/fbi-warns-sim-swapping-attacks-are-rocketing-dont-brag-about-your-crypto-online/
GIST	<p>The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) is warning about a big uptick in scams using smartphone SIM swapping to defraud victims.</p> <p>Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) swapping is an old trick, but the FBI has issued a new alert about it because of a massive leap in reported cases in 2021 compared to previous years</p> <p>Smartphones are critical tools for authenticating to online services, such as banks that use SMS for sign-in codes. It is a serious problem – if crooks can gain control of these services, they can access the victim's bank, email, social media, and bank accounts. Complaints to the FBI's Internet Crime Complaint Center (IC3) have skyrocketed in the past year.</p> <p>From January 2018 to December 2020, the FBI received 320 complaints related to SIM-swapping incidents with losses of approximately \$12 million. In 2021, it received 1,611 SIM-swapping complaints with losses of more than \$68 million, the FBI warned in a new public service announcement.</p> <p>Scammers abuse the support services of mobile network operator call centers by calling them and posing as customers to get a new SIM card. The victim doesn't know a new SIM card is connected to their phone number, which gives attackers the access they need.</p> <p>"Once the SIM is swapped, the victim's calls, texts, and other data are diverted to the criminal's device. This access allows criminals to send 'Forgot Password' or 'Account Recovery' requests to the victim's email and other online accounts associated with the victim's mobile telephone number," the FBI's IC3 warns.</p> <p>"Using SMS-based two-factor authentication, mobile application providers send a link or one-time passcode via text to the victim's number, now owned by the criminal, to access accounts. The criminal uses the codes to login and reset passwords, gaining control of online accounts associated with the victim's phone profile."</p>

To improve security, many organizations use SMS messages as a form of multi-factor authentication because the account owner is assumed to have control over the device. Codes delivered via SMS are convenient because of high adoption and the belief that SMS is better than just relying on a password that can be compromised. SIM swapping is one way for crooks to circumnavigate this security.

As [Microsoft and others have argued](#), SMS is an insecure and unreliable way to deliver codes for authenticating to online accounts. Microsoft wants organizations to use apps, such as its Authenticator, because they're a harder target to compromise.

The FBI details the many ways in which attackers can not only dupe but also entice employees of mobile network operators for nefarious goals. From the attacker's perspective, the rise of cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin and exchanges' reliance on phones for authentication adds to the appeal of SIM-swapping scams.

"Criminal actors primarily conduct SIM swap schemes using social engineering, insider threat, or phishing techniques," [the FBI's IC3 says](#).

The attacker often impersonates a victim and tricks the mobile carrier's employees into switching the victim's mobile number to a SIM card in the criminal's possession.

"Criminal actors using insider threat to conduct SIM swap schemes pay off a mobile carrier employee to switch a victim's mobile number to a SIM card in the criminal's possession. Criminal actors often use phishing techniques to deceive employees into downloading malware used to hack mobile carrier systems that carry out SIM swaps," says the FBI's IC3.

SIM swapping is a real problem. T-Mobile in December [confirmed SIM swapping was behind a major data breach](#). A former employee of a US mobile carrier was [sentenced in October for taking bribes of up to \\$500 a day to swap phone numbers](#). Operators also lack procedures to help customers when they become victims of SIM-swapping scams, [as detailed in a personal account in 2019 by ZDNet's mobile specialist Matthew Miller](#). It's a global problem for telcos, too. Australia's Telstra now [flags to banks when a mobile number is ported to counter SIM-swapping attacks](#).

The FBI's tips for protecting yourself include:

- Do not advertise information about financial assets, including ownership or investment of cryptocurrency, on social media websites and forums.
- Do not provide your mobile number or account information over the phone to representatives that request your account password or pin. Verify who they really are by dialing the customer service line of your mobile carrier.
- Avoid posting personal information online, such as mobile phone number, address, or other personal identifying information.
- Use a variation of unique passwords to access online accounts.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Russian govt. continues crackdown
SOURCE	https://www.cyberscoop.com/sky-fraud-takedown-russia-cybercrime/
GIST	<p>Russian authorities seized the websites of several Russian cybercrime forums Monday, the latest in a string of high-profile actions the government there has taken against cybercriminals.</p> <p>Visitors to the websites for Sky Fraud, a forum for stolen credit card data, were greeted with a message posted by the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs announcing that the page was blocked. Other “carding” and cybercrime forums were also seized, including Ferum and Trump’s Dumps, as well as U-A-S Shop, which offered illicit remote access to various organizations through the remote desktop protocol (RDP) tool.</p>

“The SKYFRAUD resource was closed forever during a special law enforcement operation,” the message reads in Russian translated to English. “Management ‘K’ of the BSTM of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia warns: theft of funds from bank cards is illegal!”

Within the source code of the seized website, the Russian government left a message: “Which of you is next?”

A request for comment sent to a Russian government press representative was not returned.

The website seizures came the same day the the Russian government announced the arrest of six people accused of “cyberfraud,” [according to the state-run news agency Tass](#). It’s not clear yet that the arrests and seizures of the carding sites are related, but Tass reported the suspects arrests were charged under Article 187 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, which is the same law cited on the seizure message posted on the Sky Fraud front page.

“We have never seen that many takedowns of card shops and forums within such a short period of time,” Dmitry Volkov, the CEO of Russian cybersecurity firm Group-IB, told CyberScoop in an email Tuesday. “This latest series of seizures is another blow to the global carding market that has fallen on hard times after the collapse of the Joker’s Stash.”

Joker’s Stash, [a formerly high-profile carding forum](#), shut down in early 2021 following increased international law enforcement pressure. Group-IB’s data suggested that [the carding market was already shrinking](#), dropping by 26 — \$1.9 billion to \$1.4 billion — between 2020 and 2021. The latest takedowns “will most likely reinforce this trend,” Volkov said. “The market is unlikely to bounce back given the role these platforms played.”

Three is a trend

The Russian government’s actions against Sky Fraud is just the latest in a string of cybercrime crackdowns in Russia, two of which included cooperation with U.S. law enforcement.

On Jan. 22, the Russian government announced it had arrested four suspects associated with [the formerly powerful Infraud Organization](#) hacking group, which facilitated identity theft and financial fraud to the tune of \$568 million with victims in every U.S. state, according to [a 2018 statement from the U.S. Department of Justice](#). Two of the main suspects in that case have [pleaded guilty to the U.S. charges](#) and were sentenced to five and 10-year prison sentences.

A leader of the group, Andrey Novak, was running another carding forum, UniCC when he was arrested, according to The Record. Novak’s arrest was announced Jan. 22 but he’d been detained for two months, [Tass reported](#). He’s wanted in the U.S. in connection with his role at Infraud, but Russian law prohibits extradition.

And a week before that, the [Russian government arrested 14 members of the notorious REvil ransomware group](#) in a joint operation with U.S. law enforcement, which former Russian President [Dmitry Medvedev recently hailed as an example](#) of the two nations working together in constructive ways.

Further signs of cooperation would be the Russian cybercriminals already indicted in other countries being arrested, said John Fokker, the head of cyber investigations and principal engineer at Trellix, and a former cybercrime law enforcement officer with the Dutch national police. “That would be the next step,” he said.

The full scope of the Russian government’s enforcement actions are not fully clear, as the operation may be ongoing, Fokker added. The takedown message associated with the U-A-S takedown seems to imply the suspects were charged with violating computer crimes, rather than financial crimes, suggesting perhaps there were attacks on Russian entities. Additionally, investigations and arrest operations take time to come together, so this could be reflective of ongoing law enforcement collaboration.

	<p>“Let’s face it, it’s not the most communicative collaboration that they have, it’s very fragile right now,” Fokker said. “I think it would be very nice to see if this could continue.”</p> <p>Both the REvil and Infraud arrests might be examples of joint cooperation, but the Sky Fraud case could reflect typical law enforcement activity, said Oleg Shakirov, an international security expert at the PIR Center, a Russian policy think tank.</p> <p>“My impression is that these examples just shed some light on regular fight against cybercriminals in Russia,” Shakirov told CyberScoop on Tuesday. “Cyber crime has been on the rise here for several years, just like everywhere else.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Pay-per-install malware service
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/02/several-malware-families-using-pay-per.html
GIST	<p>A detailed examination of a Pay-per-install (PPI) malware service called PrivateLoader has revealed its crucial role in the delivery of a variety of malware such as SmokeLoader, RedLine Stealer, Vidar, Raccoon, and GCleaner since at least May 2021.</p> <p>Loaders are malicious programs used for loading additional executables onto the infected machine. With PPI malware services such as PrivateLoader, malware operators pay the service owners to get their payloads "installed" based on the targets provided.</p> <p>"The accessibility and moderate costs allow malware operators to leverage these services as another weapon for rapid, bulk and geo-targeted malware infections," cybersecurity firm Intel 471 said in a new report shared with The Hacker News.</p> <p>PrivateLoader, written in the C++ programming language, is designed to retrieve URLs for the malicious payloads to be deployed on the infected host, with the distribution primarily relying on a network of bait websites that have been rigged to appear prominently in search results via search engine optimization (SEO) poisoning methods targeting users looking for pirated software.</p> <p>The administrative panel used by the PPI service offers a wealth of functions, including adding new users, configuring a link to the payload to be installed, modifying geolocation targeting based on the campaign, and even encrypting the load file.</p> <p>Other common payload families pushed by PrivateLoader include a mix of remote access trojans, banking malware, and ransomware like DanaBot, Formbook (aka XLoader), CryptBot, Remcos, NanoCore, TrickBot, Kronos, Dridex, NjRAT, BitRAT, Agent Tesla, and LockBit. "PPI services have been a pillar of cybercrime for decades," the researchers said. "Just like the wider population, criminals are going to flock to software that provides them a wide array of options to easily achieve their goals."</p>
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HEADLINE	02/09 Russian APT hackers used Covid lures
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/02/russian-apt-hackers-used-covid-19-lures.html
GIST	<p>The Russia-linked threat actor known as APT29 targeted European diplomatic missions and Ministries of Foreign Affairs as part of a series of spear-phishing campaigns mounted in October and November 2021.</p> <p>According to ESET's T3 2021 Threat Report shared with The Hacker News, the intrusions paved the way for the deployment of Cobalt Strike Beacon on compromised systems, followed by leveraging the foothold to drop additional malware for gathering information about the hosts and other machines in the same network.</p> <p>Also tracked under the names The Dukes, Cozy Bear, and Nobelium, the advanced persistent threat group is an infamous cyber-espionage group that has been active for more than a decade, with its attacks</p>

targeting Europe and the U.S., before it gained widespread attention for the [supply-chain compromise](#) of SolarWinds, leading to further infections in several downstream entities, including U.S. government agencies in 2020.

The spear-phishing attacks commenced with a COVID-19-themed phishing email impersonating the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and containing an HTML attachment that, when opened, prompts the recipients to open or save what appears to be an ISO disk image file ("Covid.iso").

Should the victim opt to open or download the file," a small piece of JavaScript decodes the ISO file, which is embedded directly in the HTML attachment." The disk image file, in turn, includes an HTML application that's executed using [mshta.exe](#) to run a piece of PowerShell code that ultimately loads the Cobalt Strike Beacon onto the infected system.

ESET also characterized APT29's reliance on HTML and ISO disk images (or VHDX files) as an evasion technique orchestrated specifically to evade Mark of the Web ([MOTW](#)) protections, a security feature introduced by Microsoft to determine the origin of a file.

"An ISO disk image doesn't propagate the so-called Mark of the Web to the files inside the disk image," the researchers said. "As such, and even if the ISO were downloaded from the internet, no warning would be displayed to the victim when the HTA is opened."

Upon successfully gaining initial access, the threat actor delivered a variety of off-the-shelf tools to query the target's Active Directory ([AdFind](#)), execute commands on a remote machine using SMB protocol ([Sharp-SMBExec](#)), carry out reconnaissance ([SharpView](#)), and even an exploit for a Windows privilege escalation flaw ([CVE-2021-36934](#)) to carry out follow-on attacks.

"Recent months have shown that The Dukes are a serious threat to western organizations, especially in the diplomatic sector," the researchers noted. "They are very persistent, have good operational security, and they know how to create convincing phishing messages."

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HEADLINE	02/09 Iranian hackers 'Out to Sea' campaign
SOURCE	https://thehackernews.com/2022/02/iranian-hackers-using-new-marlin.html
GIST	<p>An advanced persistent threat (APT) group with ties to Iran has refreshed its malware toolset to include a new backdoor dubbed Marlin as part of a long-running espionage campaign that started in April 2018.</p> <p>Slovak cybersecurity company ESET attributed the attacks — code named Out to Sea — to a threat actor called OilRig (aka APT34), while also conclusively connecting its activities to a second Iranian group tracked under the name Lyceum (Hexane aka SiameseKitten).</p> <p>"Victims of the campaign include diplomatic organizations, technology companies, and medical organizations in Israel, Tunisia, and the United Arab Emirates," ESET noted in its T3 2021 Threat Report shared with The Hacker News.</p> <p>Active since at least 2014, the hacking group is known to strike Middle Eastern governments and a variety of business verticals, including chemical, energy, financial, and telecommunications. In April 2021, the actor targeted a Lebanese entity with an implant called SideTwist, while campaigns previously attributed to Lyceum have singled out IT companies in Israel, Morocco, Tunisia, and Saudi Arabia.</p> <p>The Lyceum infection chains are also notable for the fact that they have evolved to drop multiple backdoors since the campaign came to light in 2018 — beginning with DanBot and transitioning to Shark and Milan in 2021 — with attacks detected in August 2021 leveraging a new data collection malware called Marlin.</p>

	<p>The changes don't end there. In what's a significant departure from traditional OilRig TTPs, which have involved the use of DNS and HTTPS for command-and-control (C&C) communications, Marlin makes use of Microsoft's OneDrive API for its C2 operations.</p> <p>ESET, noting that initial access to the network was achieved by means of spear-phishing as well as remote access and administration software like ITbrain and TeamViewer, cited similarities in tools and tactics between OilRig's backdoors and that of Lyceum as "too numerous and specific."</p> <p>"The ToneDeaf backdoor primarily communicated with its C&C over HTTP/S but included a secondary method, DNS tunneling, which does not function properly," the researchers said. "Shark has similar symptoms, where its primary communication method uses DNS but has a non-functional HTTP/S secondary option."</p> <p>ToneDeaf, which supports collecting system information, uploading and downloading of files, and arbitrary shell command execution, is a malware family that was deployed by the APT34 actor targeting a broad range of industries operating in the Middle East in July 2019.</p> <p>Additionally, the findings also pointed out the overlapping use of DNS as a C&C communication channel, while also employing HTTP/S as a secondary communication method and the use of multiple folders in a backdoor's working directory for uploading and downloading files from the C&C server.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Ransom gangs eye 'big game' attacks
SOURCE	https://www.scmagazine.com/perspective/cybercrime/ransomware-gangs-focus-on-big-game-attacks
GIST	<p>The last 12 months have seen a consistent rise in "Big Game" ransomware attacks targeting cash-rich organizations in the United States, with the industrial and energy, retail and finance sectors being the hardest hit and Conti and LockBit emerging as the main cybercrime gangs.</p> <p>The ransomware industry has effectively consolidated into a small number of large organized and highly-professional organizations. In 2021, the Conti ransomware gang was responsible for 505 major ransomware cases and LockBit was responsible for 465, each dwarfing the other gangs combined. Conti and LockBit are not interested in hunting small game and go for cash-rich organizations, mainly in the United States.</p> <p>In 2021, the U.S. suffered by far the largest number of ransomware breaches with 1,352 "Big Game" attacks observed in 2021, followed by France (146), Canada (140) and the UK (139). These attacks only concentrate on organizations in industries with significant financial resources. During 2021, the industrial and energy sector were the most affected, suffering 599 significant attacks, closely followed by the retail sector with 545 significant attacks and finance with 355.</p> <p>Ransomware attacks are becoming more ambitious and increasingly frequent with all geographies seeing a consistent increase in "Big Game" attacks throughout 2021. This has meant that gangs such as Conti and LockBit, between them responsible for the lion's share of successful attacks, have had to become increasingly professional and streamlined in their approach, which is reflected in their new tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs). Organizations can protect themselves only by ensuring that they have wide-ranging and up-to-date threat intelligence to ensure they stay informed of the constantly evolving TTPs of the ransomware gangs.</p> <p>These now include increased use of the "steal, encrypt and leak" tactic, which occurred throughout 2021 and involves releasing the stolen confidential data piecemeal, thereby applying continual pressure on the victim organization. New and highly-targeted spear-phishing campaigns created by Conti have also recently become increasingly ruthless in their targeting of key staff members. Customers, partners and vendors of large organizations within the U.S. are being sent malicious email lures, sometimes from the original victim's email server.</p>

Targeted recipients typically include staff working within business administration, finance and sales. Once one organization becomes compromised, legitimate email accounts are now increasingly used to send highly-effective lures to other organizations. Based on analysis of recent campaigns, these emails are now also generally backed up by the apparent use of prior legitimate email threads including contact details mimicking those of an unwitting third party and can appear utterly convincing in their content and tone. The poor English or other giveaway gaffes of the previous generation of lures are being replaced by highly professional and personalized communications.

Because of the post-pandemic growth in remote work, it's now doubly important that such staff are regularly reminded to treat all unsolicited emails with a degree of caution. The consistent use of virtual private networks (VPNs) for work purposes has also been shown to help keep employees alert and aware of the threats of working at home.

The implementation of effective multi-factor authentication (MFA) has become more important than ever, preventing threat actors from abusing stolen credentials and identities without the token, whether it's in hardware or software form. MFA can also block socially-engineered attempts to gain access to high-privilege user accounts. Organizations that make use of corporate social media accounts and similar shared services should enable MFA.

Ransomware attacks increasingly target the most sensitive data at many large organizations. It's absolutely essential that security teams encrypt all sensitive data and store it securely to prevent unauthorized access and render the data inaccessible to the threat actor in the event of data theft.

Ironically, the increasingly sleek professionalism of the big gangs has also been reflected in their increased efficiency in fulfilling their end of the bargain. In 2020, victim organizations recovered an average of roughly 60% of their stolen and encrypted data, while in 2021 the figure was around 90%. The increasing confidence of the big gangs has been caused because they are extremely careful to locate themselves far outside the reach of U.S. law enforcement. The Conti ransomware gang, for example, has been linked to Wizard Spider, a cybercrime group based in Russia, suggesting that Conti probably operates out of the same region.

So, although U.S. law enforcement agencies may continue to insist that victim organizations should refuse to cooperate or negotiate with the ransomware, many companies only have two alternatives: take precautions today or pay-up tomorrow.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Poland launches new Cyber Defense Force
SOURCE	https://www.securityweek.com/poland-launches-cybersecurity-military-unit
GIST	<p>Poland's defense minister on Tuesday appointed an army general to head a new Cyber Defense Force to officially launch the unit's operation.</p> <p>Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak said the force's mission includes defense, reconnaissance and, if need be, offensive actions to protect Poland's Armed Forces from cyberattacks.</p> <p>"We are perfectly aware that in the 21st century cyberattacks have become one of the tools of aggressive politics, also used by our neighbour," Blaszczak said, apparently referring to Russia. "For that reason these capabilities are of fundamental, key nature to Poland's Armed Forces."</p> <p>Blaszczak appointed Brig. Gen. Karol Molenda to head the unit, that will cooperate closely with the National Center for Cyber Security, initiated in 2019.</p> <p>Poland's state offices and companies occasionally fall victim to hacking.</p> <p>Last year, emails were apparently leaked from the private box of Michal Dworczyk, the head of Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's office, and made available on the internet, presenting some government</p>

	<p>officials and decisions in negative light. Dworczyk denies they are authentic, but circumstances indicate at least some are.</p> <p>Also last year, Canadian experts determined that a Polish senator, Polish lawyer and a Polish prosecutor -- all three critics of Poland's ruling Law and Justice party — were hacked with NSO's Pegasus spyware. They were the first confirmations that a tool widely abused globally by repressive governments had been used in the European Union country.</p> <p>The ruling party denies spying on opponents, but acknowledges it has Pegasus.</p> <p>The finding triggered an inquiry in the opposition-controlled Senate.</p> <p>Recently, the Canadian experts found that a 33-year-old farmer who was trying to start a political party in Poland was hacked several times by Pegasus in May 2019.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/09 UK Foreign Office serious cyber incident
SOURCE	https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/foreign-office-cybersecurity/
GIST	<p>The UK's Foreign Office was the target of "a serious cybersecurity incident," according to a document accidentally published on a government website.</p> <p>The BBC reported that the tender document revealed that unidentified hackers infiltrated Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) systems, but were detected. It added that cybersecurity company BAE Systems Applied Intelligence was called to provide "urgent support" for "remediation and investigation," for which it was paid more than £467,000. This contract, which was awarded without competitive tender due to the "extreme urgency" of the situation, ended on January 12 2022.</p> <p>There were few other details provided about the incident, including when it took place. However, it is not believed that the hackers obtained any sensitive or classified data. The tender document has since been removed from the website.</p> <p>The BBC quoted a FCDO spokesperson as saying: "We do not comment on security but have systems in place to detect and defend against potential cyber incidents."</p> <p>There are concerns the incident may have been part of a cyber-espionage campaign designed to access classified government documents. Last year, data from Microsoft found that Russia accounted for the majority of state-sponsored attacks from July 2020 to June 2021, with the SolarWinds attackers dominating threat activity.</p> <p>The SolarWinds campaign alone compromised at least nine US government departments.</p> <p>Last month, the National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) warned UK organizations to prepare for Russian cyber-attacks amid the ongoing geopolitical crisis in Ukraine.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 GiveSendGo hit by DDoS attack
SOURCE	https://www.hackread.com/christian-crowdfunding-givesendgo-ddos-attack/
GIST	<p>GoFundMe's rival GiveSendGo claims it was a victim of "heavy DDoS and bot attacks" on Friday, leading to server downtime as soon as the site started raising cash for the Canadian trucker convoy. According to the website despite technical glitches, the Christian fundraising platform raised more than \$1.35 million within 12 hours.</p> <p>It is worth noting that the Freedom Convoy 2022 campaign is seeking to raise \$16 million. As per a video message from campaign organizer Tamara Lich, the convoy aims to be "here for the long haul, as long as it takes to make sure your rights and freedom are restored."</p>

Incident Details

GiveSendGo started raising funds for Freedom Convoy's truckers protesting against COVID-19 vaccine passports and mandates after GoFundMe froze the convoy's account having \$10 million in donations.

However, the website claims that it experienced unexpected downtime when it began raising funds. The site went offline erratically after relaunching the campaign on Friday. But, the website tweeted, it could still raise funds for the campaign five times faster than its competitor GoFundMe.

As per the convoy's campaign page, donations will first go to the fuel cost and then to food and lodging while a crew of volunteers has carried jerry-cans of fuel to the truckers as they need to keep their trucks mobile even if the convoy isn't moving.

Rumble Offered Help

Rumble is a popular alternative video platform based in Canada. The platform has offered GiveSendGo technical help after learning about the incident. The company took to [Twitter](#) to inform GiveSendGo about the offer.

GiveSendGo responded quickly with the message: "Hey rumble, sent you a message!" Rumble also posted a reply to GiveSendGo that read: "Message received! We are now in direct contact with GiveSendGo #teamwork#Freedom."

At the time of writing, GiveSendGo's website was online.

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HEADLINE	02/09 Molerats hackers deploy new malware
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/molerats-hackers-deploy-new-malware-in-highly-evasive-campaign/
GIST	<p>The Palestinian-aligned APT group tracked as TA402 (aka Molerats) was spotted using a new implant named 'NimbleMamba' in a cyber-espionage campaign that leverages geofencing and URL redirects to legitimate websites.</p> <p>The campaign was discovered by Proofpoint, whose analysts observed three variations of the infection chain, all targeting governments in Middle Eastern countries, foreign policy think tanks, and a state-owned airline.</p> <p>As for the timeline of the recent attacks, the actors first used NimbleMamba in November 2021 and continued the operation until late January 2022.</p> <p>Infection chain</p> <p>In most attacks, TA402 uses spear-phishing emails that contain links to malware-dropping sites. The victims need to be within the targeted scope, or they are redirected to legitimate news sites.</p> <p>If the target's IP address matches the defined targeted region, a copy of NimbleMamba is dropped on their system inside a RAR file.</p> <p>Proofpoint observed three different attach chains with slight variations concerning the theme of the phishing lure, the redirection URL, and the malware-hosting sites.</p> <p>NimbleMamba</p> <p>Proofpoint believes that TA402 developed NimbleMamba to replace LastConn, a backdoor and malware downloader exposed in a June 2021 report by the same firm.</p> <p>In turn, LastConn is thought to have replaced SharpStage, exposed by Cybereason, in December 2020.</p>

TA402 have demonstrated their capacity to quickly develop new custom tools when their existing set is uncovered and typically go through a period of distinct hiatus when they refresh.

NimbleMamba inevitably carries some code similarities with LastConn, but these are limited to the programming language, C2 encoding scheme, and the use of Dropbox API for communications.

The new tool features much more sophisticated anti-analysis systems and contains multiple guardrails to ensure that it only executes on targeted machines.

For example, the host needs to have the Arabic language pack installed, and the malware needs to be able to connect to four IP geolocation API services; otherwise, it won't run.

If the prerequisites are met, NimbleMamba retrieves its configuration from a JustPaste.it page, which contains the obfuscated API auth key for C2 communication.

"NimbleMamba has the traditional capabilities of an intelligence-gathering trojan and is likely designed to be the initial access," explains Proofpoint's [report](#).

"Functionalities include capturing screenshots and obtaining process information from the computer. Additionally, it can detect user interaction, such as looking for mouse movement."

The RAR files fetched from Dropbox don't always contain only NimbleMamba, as the analysts also retrieved the BrittleBush trojan, which is most likely used as a backup tool.

Outlook

Now that the refreshed toolset of TA402 has been exposed again, the actors are expected to go dormant for a while to develop new tools.

Already, the domains used for delivering NimbleMamba and C2 communications have been taken offline. The critical thing to remember is that the particular actor maintains the same target focus, serves the same pro-Palestinian objectives, and uses mainly phishing emails to initiate the infection chain.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Threat actors revive 20yr-old tactic
SOURCE	https://www.darkreading.com/attacks-breaches/threat-actors-revive-20-year-old-tactic-in-microsoft-365-phishing-attacks
GIST	<p>A technique that threat actors first used some 20 years ago to trick users into executing malicious files appears to be making a comeback.</p> <p>Security vendor Vade on Tuesday said its researchers had spotted more than 400 attacks in the past two weeks employing the method — called right-to-left override (RLO) — in a phishing campaign targeting Microsoft 365 users. Just two out of 58 malware detection tools on VirusTotal were able to detect the threat, Vade said.</p> <p>In an RLO attack, adversaries take advantage of a specific non-printing Unicode character, [U+202e], to disguise extensions so users get tricked into executing malicious files. U+202e is an RLO Unicode character that, when used before a particular word or piece of text, changes all subsequent text to be displayed right-to-left, as is needed to support Hebrew and Arabic languages. For example, when the character is used before the word "Vade," the text would be displayed as "edaV."</p> <p>In the past, attackers have taken advantage of the Unicode character to disguise executable files. Vade pointed to how attackers would use U+202e in an executable file like "abctxt.exe," for example, so it would appear as the more benign looking "abcexe.txt." To achieve this, Vade said, the adversary would only need to insert U+202e into the string this way: "abc [U+202e] txt.exe"</p>

Over the years, attacker interest in the technique waned as detection mechanisms improved. But in recent months, some adversaries have begun reusing the technique. Last August, the Health Information Sharing and Analysis Center (H-ISAC) issued an [advisory warning about threat actors using the right-to-left-override](#) character to obfuscate malicious files and deliver the Cobalt Strike toolkit on systems belonging to organizations in the healthcare sector.

"Modifying and improving old techniques to adapt to today's environments is common among attackers, who are always looking for new ways to break through," says Adrien Gendre, chief technology and product officer as well as co-founder of Vade.

In the campaign that the security vendor recently observed, adversaries employed the RLO technique to try to trick email recipients into believing they were opening an audio file when clicking on the file actually took them to a credential phishing site instead.

For the scam, the attackers sent Microsoft 365 users an email notification inviting them to access an attached voicemail file. The email subject contained the recipient's actual name, and other aspects of the email looked genuine as well, such as the date and time. The attached file, too, ended with either an ".mp3" or a ".wav" file extension, which is what a user would normally expect with an audio file. However, clicking on it would only lead the user to an apparent Microsoft login page that sought to make the user enter their password.

"Previous attacks popular in the '90s and early 2000s used RLO spoofing to conceal executable malware files," Gendre says. "The recent RLO campaign uses the technique to disguise an html file, which includes a link to a phishing page, as an MP3 file that the user believes is a voicemail message."

Few security tools were able to detect the scam because they are designed to scan for IP and domain reputations and known malware signatures. "[With] the recent attacks, the attachments do not include known malware code but instructions in the html file to open a phishing page," he notes.

More Trouble on the Horizon?

Vade's report points to another [report that researchers at Cambridge University](#) published last November about a vulnerability they discovered in the Unicode specification ([CVE-2021-42574](#)) that gives attackers a way to disguise and insert malicious code into software during the development phase. The vulnerability allows attackers to use certain Unicode characters, including the RLO (U+202e) character, to basically reorder code that would change its logic while still retaining visual and semantic correctness. "Adversaries can leverage this deception to commit vulnerabilities into code that will not be seen by human reviewers," the two Cambridge University researchers wrote.

"A developer with access to source code could encode source code with this technique," Gendre says. "Also, as we saw with the SolarWinds attack, it could come from outside the organization via a breach."

Another vulnerability in the Unicode specification that the researchers discovered ([CVE-2021-42694](#)) gives attackers a way to use characters that appear near identical to each other — or homoglyphs — to inject malicious code during software development, which is almost impossible to detect visually.

Gendre notes that one way organizations can mitigate risk from these vulnerabilities is to ban text directionality in compilers and language specifications.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Kimsuki hackers use commodity RATs
SOURCE	https://www.bleepingcomputer.com/news/security/kimsuki-hackers-use-commodity-rats-with-custom-gold-dragon-malware/?&web_view=true
GIST	South Korean researchers have spotted a new wave of activity from the Kimsuky hacking group, involving commodity open-source remote access tools dropped with their custom backdoor, Gold Dragon.

Kimsuky is a North Korean state-sponsored hacking group, also known as TA406, who has been actively involved in cyber-espionage campaigns since 2017.

The group has demonstrated impressive [operational versatility](#) and threat activity pluralism, engaging in malware distribution, phishing, data collection, and even cryptocurrency theft.

In the latest campaign, spotted by analysts at ASEC (AhnLab), Kimsuky uses xRAT in targeted attacks against South Korean entities. The campaign started on January 24, 2022, and is still ongoing.

Commodity RAT

xRAT is an open-source remote access and administration tool available for free on [GitHub](#). The malware provides a range of features such as keylogging, remote shell, file manager actions, reverse HTTPS proxy, AES-128 communication, and automated social engineering.

A sophisticated threat actor may choose to use commodity RATs because, for basic reconnaissance operations, these tools are perfectly adequate and don't require much configuration.

This allows threat actors to focus their resources on developing later-stage malware that requires more specialized functionality depending on the defense tools/practices present on the target.

Also, commodity RATs blend in with activity from a broad spectrum of threat actors, making it harder for analysts to attribute malicious activity to a particular group.

Gold Dragon backdoor

Gold Dragon is a second-stage backdoor that Kimsuky typically deploys after a file-less PowerShell-based first-stage attack that leverages steganography.

It has been documented in a 2020 report by [Cybereason](#) and a 2021 analysis by researchers at [Cisco Talos](#), so this is not a novel malware.

However, as ASEC explains in its report, the variant they spotted in this latest campaign features additional functions such as the exfiltration of basic system information.

The malware no longer uses system processes for this function but instead installs the xRAT tool to steal the needed information manually.

The RAT comes under the guise of an executable named cp1093.exe, which copies a normal PowerShell process (powershell_ise.exe) to the "C:\ProgramData\" path and executes via process hollowing.

On the operational aspects of Gold Dragon, it continues to use the same process hollowing method on iexplore.exe and svchost.exe, and still attempts to disable real-time detection features in AhnLab AV products.

"The attacker installed Gold Dragon through the exclusive installer (installer_sk5621.com.co.exe). The installer downloads Gold Dragon compressed in the form of a Gzip file from the attacker's server, decompresses it as "in[random 4 numbers].tmp" in the %temp% path, then executes it via rundll32.exe."
- [ASEC](#).

Next, the installer adds a new registry key to establish startup persistence for the malware payload (glu32.dll).

Finally, Kimsuky drops an uninstaller (UnInstall_kr5829.co.in.exe) that can delete the traces of compromise if and when needed.

	AhnLab suggests that users should refrain from opening attachments on emails from unknown sources, as this remains the main channel of malware distribution for Kimsuky.
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HEADLINE	02/08 At-home Covid test portal reopens for 3rd time
SOURCE	https://mynorthwest.com/3341804/washington-reopens-covid-at-home-test-portal/
GIST	<p>Washington residents can once again access the state’s test portal online to order COVID-19 rapid tests at no cost that will be shipped to their home.</p> <p>This round — which is the third time the portal has opened — will have 1.45 million tests available, serving 290,000 households.</p> <p>On Jan. 21, the state opened the portal for the first time with 1.4 million tests available for order. Within eight hours, all tests had been claimed, and approximately 340,000 households received tests. In the second round, 130,000 households were served.</p> <p>Order an at-home test kit (up to five tests) online here while supplies last.</p> <p>Tests should arrive within a few days of the order being placed. When more supplies become available, the state will reopen the portal again.</p> <p>Free at-home COVID tests are also available through the federal program here. Additionally, at-home tests can be purchased at some local retailers and pharmacies. If you have health insurance, most insurers will now cover or pay you back for up to eight at-home tests per month.</p> <p>Find a testing location in Washington near you here.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 DOL data breach info already ‘dark web’?
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/personal-info-from-state-licensing-agency-database-may-already-be-on-the-dark-web/
GIST	<p>Personal information of some of the hundreds of thousands of licensed professionals potentially exposed in a breach of a Washington state database may already have shown up on “dark web” clearinghouses used by identity thieves.</p> <p>State investigators haven’t said whether Social Security numbers and other personal data were actually stolen from a database of more than 250,000 professional and business licensees used by the state Department of Licensing, agency officials said. The database is maintained by Salesforce, a San Francisco software company.</p> <p>But several individuals who previously had a business license in Washington learned recently that their personal information was detected on Jan. 24 on the dark web, an anonymized section of the World Wide Web accessed through special software. Stolen personal data is often traded there for use in impostor fraud and other illicit activities.</p> <p>Jan. 24 is the same day Washington state cybersecurity investigators detected “chatter” on the dark web about “accessed” personal data from Department of Licensing, agency officials said Friday. The agency shut down its online licensing portal, known as POLARIS, that day, and has kept it offline since.</p> <p>Pam Hughes, a licensed real estate broker in the Seattle area, said her bank notified her Jan. 28 that personal data, including her Social Security number, turned up on the dark web on Jan. 24. It was just the most recent of nearly a dozen data alerts she and her husband have received in recent years. “If it didn’t cause so much of a headache, it would also be funny,” said Hughes.</p>

“When I saw the [Jan. 24] date, that’s actually what made the alarm bells go off in my head,” said Mike Burlingame, a Florida resident who had licensed a small telecommunications company in Washington around 15 years ago, and who contacted The Seattle Times after reading about the breach.

Burlingame said he was notified Feb. 1 by his credit monitoring service that his Social Security number and other personal information were discovered on the dark web on Jan. 24. Also exposed was personal data for Burlingame’s wife, who was also registered on the company license.

(On Tuesday, Department of Licensing officials said Burlingame wasn’t a licensed business owner in Washington, but may have had a business license through another agency.)

Another report of Department of Licensing data appearing on the dark web was made by a third individual to the [Identity Theft Resource Center](#), a California-based nonprofit that helps identity theft victims, said James Lee, the center’s chief operating officer.

Although these instances of personal data on the dark web aren’t conclusive evidence of wide-scale theft of Department of Licensing data, “that is certainly a strong indicator that the data was exfiltrated — was removed — and now it’s available for misuse,” said Lee, an expert in identity theft and data breaches.

The potential breach, which the Department of Licensing [made public Feb. 3](#), may have affected personal data from people and companies in [23 professional and business categories](#), ranging from auctioneers to real estate agents to funeral directors.

The potential breach remains under investigation by the state Office of Cybersecurity, the state Attorney General’s Office and a third-party cybersecurity firm, CrowdStrike, Department of Licensing officials said. It’s still unclear whether licensees’ personal data was actually stolen or simply was exposed to possible theft, Department of Licensing officials said Monday.

The agency also doesn’t yet know exactly how many licensees may have been affected, and has yet to determine whether the potential breach occurred within the agency, in the database or in some other part of the data system.

“We’re just not going to have a full picture until the investigation is done,” Department of Licensing spokesperson Christine Anthony said Monday.

A Salesforce official said the company had no indication that their database had been compromised, but declined to provide more details.

“At this time, we have no evidence of a vulnerability inherent to the Salesforce platform,” said spokesperson Allen Tsai in an emailed response to questions.

In late 2020, [a software vendor used by the state auditor’s office suffered a data breach that likely led to files being accessed by an unauthorized user](#).

Because there have been [numerous data breaches in recent years](#), it’s often difficult for investigators to link data on the dark web with a particular breach, said Trace Fooshee, a senior analyst and expert in fraud, data security and money laundering at Aite Group, a financial services consultancy.

“There are lots and lots of sources of exposed [personal information] out there,” Fooshee said. “They happen all the time.”

Indeed, Burlingame himself was caught up in the [T-Mobile data breach](#), when hackers reportedly accessed personal information linked to nearly 50 million people.

But like Lee, Fooshee said the coincidence of events on Jan. 24 may be notable. “Given that context, it makes sense that perhaps ... this most recent breach was likely the source of where the information [dark web] came from,” he said.

The Feb. 1 notification Burlingame received indicated that on Jan. 24, the credit monitoring agency found a new online record with his name, birthdate and Social Security number, his former Washington state ZIP code, Washington driver’s license number and a current phone number. Burlingame shared a screenshot of the Feb. 1 notification.

Burlingame said he was perplexed by the apparent age of the data that showed up on the dark web.

He said his Washington state company was dissolved around 2008 when ownership was transferred to another firm. The data reference in the Feb. 1 notification from his credit monitoring service appeared to be from “an inactive record that they would have still had ... in their database,” he said. “The fact that I’m seeing data that would have been provided for an inactive ... 15-year-old company is extremely concerning.”

On Friday, Anthony, the Department of Licensing spokesperson, said there were around 257,000 active licenses in the department system, but also indicated that “there are likely more records that may be identified while conducting our investigation.” On Tuesday, agency spokesperson Nathan Olson said the licensing system also contained records of “individuals whose business licenses have expired,” but did not have an exact number.

Anthony said it also wasn’t clear how long investigators would need to determine whether and how much personal data was stolen from the database. If data was stolen, Anthony said, the Department of Licensing likely will offer credit monitoring services to potential victims.

In the meantime, some licensed professionals are trying to determine how damaging a data breach might be.

Information such as Social Security numbers and addresses might be used to carry out fraud, such as filing bogus unemployment claims, [as happened in Washington in the spring of 2020](#).

But some licensed professions might have other, equally sensitive information in the Department of Licensing database, said Neil Harrison, president of the Washington Association of Legal Investigators.

“A lot of our members and licensed [private investigators] are not only former law enforcement, but they’re also former federal law enforcement and ‘alphabet’ agency people,” Harrison said, referring to agencies such as the FBI. “So you’ve got a very large potential of ... significant problems that can be caused for the individual.”

The Department of Licensing has opened a call center to handle questions about the incident: 855-568-2052.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Charge: laundering billions stolen Bitcoin
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/nyregion/ilya-lichtenstein-heather-morgan.html
GIST	<p>Before they were charged on Tuesday with conspiring to launder \$3.6 billion in Bitcoin stolen from one of the world’s largest virtual currency exchanges, Ilya Lichtenstein and his wife, Heather Morgan, dispensed advice and opinions on the cryptocurrency’s prospects and the importance of safeguarding your stash.</p> <p>“Bitcoin will become a lesson in economics textbooks of the classic bubble riddled with scams,” Ms. Morgan wrote in a 2014 blog post.</p>

Mr. Lichtenstein also appeared concerned about how people were caring for their crypto. In a November post on Twitter, he criticized a news article for including “almost nothing about how to secure your keys” — the digital passwords that allow owners to access their Bitcoin.

But Mr. Lichtenstein’s own keys were not secure enough to fend off a search warrant, federal officials said. And not long after the Justice Department announced the charges against the couple, their social media musings and extensive online presence had transformed them from relative unknowns to objects of widespread fascination and scorn.

Ms. Morgan, 31, describes herself on LinkedIn as a “serial entrepreneur, prolific writer, irreverent comedic rapper, and investor in B2B software companies with high growth potential.”

She raps in clunky fashion under the name Razzlekhan — the self-styled “crocodile of Wall Street” — in YouTube videos like “Versace Bedouin,” which she calls her anthem and which was filmed, naturally, on Wall Street.

“Everyone worries too much about what’s proper,” Ms. Morgan raps awkwardly in one vulgarity-filled video. “But not Razz, no shame, that don’t stop her.”

She filmed the video close to home: She and Mr. Lichtenstein live in a two-bedroom, two-bathroom condominium on an upper floor at a 42-story luxury building at Wall and Water Streets, records show. The unit has an estimated value of about \$1 million, according to the real estate listing site Zillow, but the couple appears to rent rather than own the property.

Ms. Morgan’s other endeavors included contributing articles to Forbes and Inc. In her Forbes pieces, she profiled an up-and-coming chef who helped cater last year’s Met Gala, charted the career arc of the teenage Australian rapper [the Kid Laroi](#) and delved into the differences between how men and women negotiate pay.

In one 2020 article for the magazine, she explored how to “protect your business” as “cybercriminals and fraudsters are taking advantage of disruptions caused by the pandemic.”

For Inc.’s entrepreneurial-minded audience, she wrote service-oriented pieces with titles like “3 Great Ways to Train New Hires,” “4 Simple Marketing Rules That Drove \$370 Million in Sales” and “3 Steps to Become an Expert in Anything.”

Inc. did not respond to a request for comment about Ms. Morgan’s ties to the publication. Forbes declined to comment, but in its own article about her arrest, it said in an editor’s note that “Heather Morgan was a ForbesWomen contributor from July 2017 until Forbes ended the relationship in September 2021, and was never an employee.”

Her LinkedIn profile says she earned a bachelor’s degree in economics and international relations from the University of California, Davis and a master’s degree in economics of international development at American University of Cairo. The registrar’s office at the University of California, Davis confirmed that she graduated in 2011. Information about her studies at American University of Cairo was not immediately available.

Mr. Lichtenstein, 34, who is known as “Dutch,” describes himself on LinkedIn as a “technology entrepreneur, coder and investor” who is “interested in blockchain technology, automation, and big data.”

He graduated from high school in Glenview, Ill., and from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a bachelor’s degree in psychology, according to his LinkedIn profile. His academic record could not immediately be confirmed.

It was not clear when the couple met. But in a June 2019 Facebook post, Mr. Lichtenstein described how he proposed to “my best friend and the woman of my dreams” in a “weird, creative multi-channel

marketing campaign” that involved Razzlekhan posters slapped all over New York City and, ultimately, a Times Square billboard.

The Bitcoin at issue in the charges against Mr. Lichtenstein, who the authorities said has dual Russian and U.S. citizenship, and Ms. Morgan was stolen by hackers from the Hong Kong-based Bitfinex exchange in 2016.

A Justice Department official declined to comment on whether the couple were involved in the hacking itself, but officials said they had employed various techniques to try to launder the stolen Bitcoin.

The maneuvers, according to prosecutors, included opening accounts under false names; moving stolen funds in small sums in thousands of transactions to avoid detection; using computers to automate their transactions; spreading funds across virtual-currency exchanges; and using U.S. business accounts to obscure their illegal activity.

Despite their efforts, that activity sometimes drew the scrutiny of cryptocurrency exchanges. In one instance, the couple used false identities to open seven accounts on a single exchange, only to have them frozen when the identities could not be verified. The accounts held over \$186,000 in assets.

They nonetheless used cryptocurrency housed at another exchange to buy prepaid debit cards. One \$500 card bought from Walmart was used to pay for Uber and Hotels.com purchases and to buy a PlayStation.

In a less mundane example of where the authorities say the stolen Bitcoin went, the couple is accused of using some of it to buy nonfungible tokens, or NFTs — blockchain-based collectibles that [Kevin Roose, a New York Times columnist](#), has described as “intangible fragments of the internet” that can be bought and sold “as if they were physical objects.”

The couple, who were charged in a criminal complaint, made an initial appearance in Federal District Court in Manhattan on Tuesday. A judge ordered them released on bond: \$5 million in Mr. Lichtenstein’s case and \$3 million in Ms. Morgan’s. A lawyer representing them did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Ms. Morgan’s public opining about Bitcoin included the 2014 blog post in which she wrote that “it is difficult to predict the exact time window of when Bitcoin’s value will reach zero.”

“But it will happen sooner or later,” she continued, “because it is a fragile asset which retains no real value.”

And in a [message posted on Twitter](#) in December, she revisited her opinion that the cryptocurrency market might be overinflated.

“The amount of spam I’m getting about sketchy crypto get rich stuff really makes me feel like this bubble is gonna pop soon!” she wrote.

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HEADLINE	02/08 DOJ seizes \$3.6B stolen bitcoin; 2 arrests
SOURCE	https://www.wsj.com/articles/justice-department-says-it-seized-3-6-billion-in-stolen-cryptocurrency-exchange-hack-11644339381?mod=hp_lead_pos7
GIST	<p>WASHINGTON—The Justice Department said Tuesday it seized over \$3.6 billion worth of digital currency stolen during a hack of a cryptocurrency exchange and arrested two suspects for allegedly trying to launder the proceeds.</p> <p>The value of the cryptocurrency at the time it was seized last week marks the largest financial seizure ever by the Justice Department, officials said.</p>

Ilya Lichtenstein, 34 years old, and his wife, Heather Morgan, 31, were both arrested without incident Tuesday morning in Manhattan, the department said. They are scheduled to make their initial court appearances Tuesday afternoon.

According to court documents, the suspects allegedly conspired to launder [nearly 120,000 bitcoin stolen from Bitfinex's platform in 2016](#) after a hacker breached the exchange's systems and initiated more than 2,000 unauthorized transactions. The transactions funneled the stolen bitcoin to a digital wallet being controlled by Mr. Lichtenstein, federal prosecutors said.

"Today's arrests, and the department's largest financial seizure ever, show that cryptocurrency is not a safe haven for criminals," said Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco. "In a futile effort to maintain digital anonymity, the defendants laundered stolen funds through a labyrinth of cryptocurrency transactions."

Mr. Lichtenstein and Ms. Morgan face charges relating to conspiracy to commit money laundering and conspiracy to defraud the U.S. They weren't charged with carrying out the hack of Bitfinex. The Justice Department's investigation is ongoing, officials said.

Mr. Lichtenstein didn't respond to a request for comment sent to two email addresses linked to him. Ms. Morgan couldn't immediately be reached for comment.

Hong Kong-based digital-currency exchange Bitfinex said it was hacked in 2016, causing the price of bitcoin to sharply drop. At the time, the value of the stolen bitcoin was valued at around \$70 million, officials said.

[Bitcoin, like many virtual currencies](#), can fluctuate wildly in price and has soared enormously since 2016. The \$3.6 billion recovered by the Justice Department is the value of the bitcoin at the time of seizure, which occurred last week, officials said. Overall the current value of the stolen bitcoin linked to the hack is valued today at about \$4.5 billion, officials said, but only about 94,000 of the roughly 119,754 stolen bitcoin were recovered.

Bitcoin is a popular type of so-called cryptocurrency, a kind of digital currency that exists as open-source computer code and that is maintained by the operations of a vast worldwide network of computers. Officials said the fact that blockchain—the inalterable ledger that records bitcoin transactions—is public was helpful in their investigation.

Ari Redboard, a former senior Treasury Department official now at the blockchain analytics firm TRM Labs, said the arrests show the developing capabilities of investigators to trace cryptocurrency flows, including years after illicit transactions occurred.

"As the obfuscation techniques evolve, so do the tools authorities have to track them," said Mr. Redboard. "The blockchain is forever."

The case also helps law enforcement understand the strategies hackers, terrorists and other criminals are using in digital-currency markets to try to move illicit funds, he said.

The Justice Department created a [National Cryptocurrency Enforcement Team](#) last October to prosecute criminals that rely on cryptocurrency and recover illicit proceeds.

Last year, authorities were able to claw back about \$2.3 million in [bitcoin that was paid](#) by Colonial Pipeline Co. to a Russian ransomware gang that hacked the major conduit, causing a shutdown that lasted for days on the pipeline that runs from the Gulf Coast to New Jersey.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Cities' crypto push draws fans, critics
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/Technology/wireStory/money-cities-crypto-push-draws-fans-critics-82751397

NEW YORK -- A small group of cryptocurrency enthusiasts has an offer that they're hoping U.S. cities can't refuse.

The group City Coins is asking Miami and New York to accept the equivalent of millions of dollars in a new cryptocurrency, and at least some of the money is real: Last week, Miami Mayor Francis Suarez announced that City Coins had transferred \$5.25 million to the city.

The dizzying proposal has leaders in other cities, like Philadelphia and Dearborn, Michigan, clamoring to get in on a deal they hope might patch budgets, similar to how some cities and states had hoped lotteries or legalized gambling would be a solution to financial problems.

That hype also benefits people who get in early on the new currencies, which is part of what fuels arguments that cryptocurrency startups too closely resemble pyramid schemes.

When Suarez announced in November that his city would partner with the group, one of its leaders, Patrick Stanley, told news outlet and cryptocurrency price index company CoinDesk TV that Suarez "just turned his city into an oil producing country that gives Bitcoin yield to its citizens, like that is incredible."

That hasn't happened and there are a lot of hurdles to clear, both legal and technological, before it could.

For starters, the value of cryptocurrencies can fluctuate dramatically. The popular cryptocurrency Bitcoin lost close to half its value between November and the end of January, falling from a peak of \$67,500 to just above \$35,000; it has since bounced back a bit to around \$43,000. The anonymity of cryptocurrencies also makes them popular with criminals. Scams are also plentiful in the world of cryptocurrency trading.

The group's proposal expands on the blockchain technology that supports Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies. People who want to support the city of Miami can invest in Miami Coin (as can anyone else); part of their investment is then funneled to the city. The rest is divided up among other investors in Miami Coin. The way the system is designed favors people who make bigger investments and those who get in early.

If it goes according to plan, prices of the new cryptocurrency go up and the city gets free money.

Participants in the City Coins project hope that Miami residents will eventually be able to hold their identification, pay taxes or vote using the blockchain technology Miami Coin is built on -- thereby increasing the coins' value. The contract that City Coins signed with Miami does not mention any of these possibilities.

The proposed arrangement is unusual from an economic development perspective as well, in part because City Coins says it is not a company but rather a kind of collective. Its website does not list any employees or contact information besides a link to the messaging app Discord. It is registered in Delaware as a nonprofit organization. Online records show it is not registered in Florida.

Reached on Discord, community lead Andre Serrano estimated that the number of people involved in City Coins numbers between 10,000-15,000, though he's basing that on City Coins' Twitter followers and the people who have joined the Discord chat.

In a statement, Suarez said the city cannot legally hold cryptocurrencies. So for now, he said, "City Coins acts as a custodian of Miami's rewards until they are converted into dollars and formally gifted to the city," which the first \$5.25 million was on Feb. 2.

For scale, the city of Miami's operating budget adopted in October was more than \$1.3 billion.

"We have a lot of ideas for how we can spend the money and we fully intend to listen to the community's input as to how to deploy the funds," Suarez said in a statement, suggesting education was a priority.

To John Forrer, a research professor at George Washington's public policy school, the unprecedented arrangement presents potential pitfalls for any municipality that signs up.

"There is so much uncertainty and it's so brand new, are you sure you've investigated all of the risks and that you have a way of handling them whatever they are?" he said, adding it's important the city can hold the outside party accountable if needed.

In the contract City Coins signed with the Miami, Stanley is listed as the point of contact with an address at a Los Angeles strip mall. He has appeared alongside Suarez in interviews about Miami Coin where he is identified as the community lead for City Coins. He did not reply to questions about the structure and organization of City Coins. In public statements, Stanley has said he formerly worked with Stacks, the cryptocurrency ecosystem that City Coins is built on.

Liat Shetret, director of regulatory affairs and compliance policy at the risk analysis firm Solidus Labs, said cities may want to consider blockchain technology to increase financial transparency. But she's worried that politicians are hawking cryptocurrencies as an attention-getting gimmick without preparing their cities for dealing with new problems such as money laundering.

The nature of the blockchain means that while it's possible to see which accounts own Miami Coin or are mining it, the real identities of those people are not publicly visible. Currency exchanges ask for basics such as names, addresses and Social Security numbers; it's unclear how much identifying information the coin creators collect. Participants do not need to be residents of Miami.

Neither Suarez's office, Stanley nor the Stacks Foundation replied to questions as to whether any of them had access to the personal information of Miami Coin participants or if they had concerns about the anonymity of the people involved.

"Keeping bad actors off of these platforms is crucial," Shetret said.

While New York's mayor, Eric Adams, has also been a booster of cryptocurrencies, his administration has not yet signed onto the project, despite celebrating the launch of a New York City Coin in November.

Adams' office did not reply to questions about whether the mayor was considering accepting any funds from City Coins.

New York residents can't currently buy the New York coin because the lone exchange offering it isn't licensed in the state. "We're optimistic that it'll be approved by midyear," said Larissa Bundziak, a spokesperson for the exchange Okcoin, which started offering the New York coin — to non-New Yorkers — on Jan. 26.

Last week, some City Coins participants expressed disappointment with how the experiment is going so far and argued in a chat room on the Discord app about whether the group should launch cryptocurrencies in new cities or wait for the value of the coins in Miami and New York to prove themselves more.

"Getting a city to claim free money is easy," one participant wrote. "It takes more than that to actually provide value," so that in the long term, there are good reasons for people to participate.

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Terror Conditions

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HEADLINE	02/08 SoFi Stadium a terror target? Super scare
SOURCE	https://www.latimes.com/sports/story/2022-02-08/sofi-stadium-a-terror-target-how-an-ex-homeland-security-chief-caused-a-super-scare

The journey that led to the city of Inglewood hosting a [Super Bowl](#) was never going to be neat or linear. Of all the entanglements and absurdities that popped up during these seven years to threaten the timeline — ticking away toward the dreamy endpoint of Sunday's [Super Bowl LVI](#) — there is one which just might stick out above all the others.

Perhaps time has forgotten the curveball thrown by former Homeland Security Chief Tom Ridge in Dec. 2014, back when [SoFi Stadium](#) was only a flicker in [Rams owner Stan Kroenke](#)'s eye and the NFL could have just as easily returned to Southern California in downtown Los Angeles or the city of Carson.

Ridge, then retired from politics and working as a consultant in the private sector, released a report asserting that a stadium built in Inglewood's Hollywood Park would become an elevated target for terrorist activity due to its proximity to L.A. International Airport, located about three miles west of the proposed site.

James Butts, the mayor of Inglewood, certainly has not forgotten.

"Preposterous" was the word Butts repeated frequently during a recent interview in his conference room at Inglewood City Hall. When Ridge's report came up in conversation, Butts naturally defaulted back into the fighter's pose that fits well with his proud underdog city that has punched its way back onto the world's stage.

To Inglewood, the matchup between the hometown [Rams](#) and [Cincinnati Bengals](#) will be much more than a game. It's a defining moment years in the making, signifying a comeback few could have predicted when the [Lakers](#) left the Forum and moved downtown to Staples Center.

And Ridge, the former governor of Pennsylvania and the first U.S. secretary of homeland security, had tried to put an end to all of it.

"As a major American hub for transportation and commerce," Ridge opined, "it is clear that LAX is attractive to terrorists and other mal-intended actors seeking a target with significant symbolic and economic value."

"Likewise," he continued, "the NFL brand is recognized around the globe for being distinctly American and, for many in the world of sport, an iconic brand. Therefore, placement of the stadium at the Inglewood/Hollywood Park location, would layer existing risk and introduce new risks to an expanded amalgamation of NFL-related stakeholders."

Ridge called the scenario a "terrorist event twofer," a proposition that quickly reached the desk of Butts, the former police chief of Santa Monica who worked in public safety with the Los Angeles World Airports.

It would soon come out that Ridge had been hired by AEG, which was competing with Inglewood for the stadium, to analyze the security risks of the Hollywood Park location. AEG's proposal was to place a stadium called Farmers Field next to Staples Center, its premier venue.

"First of all," Butts said, "every plane that lands at LAX makes its approach over downtown Los Angeles, right where Farmers Field was scheduled to be. So any danger that was for a stadium to be here in Inglewood should exist for that location as well. So it was clearly a high-school term paper that should have gotten an 'F.' "

While Ridge's premise was deathly serious, his report's lack of polish made it surprisingly easy to laugh off. Images of the LAX runways and Hollywood Park were pasted sloppily from Google Earth. Headshots of known terrorists were sprinkled in like clip art. It included a section on the possibility of "laser attacks" that have the potential to blind pilots during landing and takeoff. Using one of his favorite phrases, Ridge, appointed Homeland Security Chief by President George W. Bush two years after the 9/11 attacks, cautioned: "We have watches, but the terrorists have time."

The report felt light on supporting evidence at just 14 pages, and even Ridge specified that while “not a technical assessment, we have conducted the review and have identified significant macro-level risks. ... Based on our experience, we would expect that a more in-depth, all-hazard risk assessment would be completed and it would most likely identify additional concerns.”

Butts would have loved to ignore Ridge’s claims as pure fantasy, but once they went public, he had no choice but to go deeper to refute Ridge and provide the NFL confidence to move forward with Inglewood.

Butts called upon Errol Southers, a counterterrorism expert and security analyst whom Butts had worked with over the years, to create a report that would far surpass the work Ridge had put into his.

“I remember [Ridge’s] report very vividly,” said Southers, now the director of the Safe Communities Institute at the USC Price School of Public Policy. “It was a 14-page report. What got my attention first of all was that it was a report that was so brief on a project that was so massive. The footprint for what is now SoFi is larger than the footprint for Disneyland.

“It was really zeroing in on its close proximity to LAX but not mentioning there’s 10 other NFL stadiums in the U.S. that have the same proximity to an international airport. So I was trying to understand, why is this airport different in terms of threat?”

Southers interviewed experts from the Federal Aviation Administration, the Department of Homeland Security and pilots, among others. Southers himself had become an expert on stadium security, having consulted during the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing.

“We did an all-hazards approach — chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive incidents, and then we added drones to that,” Southers said. “That resulted in a 100-page document.”

Ridge, who is recovering from a stroke suffered in the fall, declined comment through a spokesman. The Rams and the NFL also chose not to comment.

Southers believes that his research was key in convincing the NFL to pick Inglewood.

“Our report was not challenged at all,” he said, “and they got their green light for the stadium with flying colors. We were very proud of that.”

Said Butts, “[AEG] wanted to create confusion and doubt about the viability of the project, and they wanted us to chase our tails.”

Security during a Super Bowl week is a monumental challenge no matter the game location. This will be the first of many chances in the decades to come for Inglewood to prove that Ridge was off in his assessment.

“If a decision is made to move forward at the Inglewood/Hollywood Park site,” Ridge wrote forebodingly, “the NFL, state and local leaders, and those they represent, must be willing to accept the significant risk and the possible consequences that accompany a stadium at the location.”

Sitting in his office on the USC campus last week, Southers was comfortable setting the security stakes for Sunday.

“No pun intended, it’s the Super Bowl, so if you’re a terrorist, it’s the Super Bowl of targets,” Southers said.

“It’s not just any other game. Unfortunately, it’s the Twin Towers. It’s not just another high rise in America. It’s the Pentagon, the seat of our defense department. So it’s iconic, and everybody in the world

	is watching it. The responsibilities from a security and safety perspective is huge. But, believe me, we've got the best people in the country that will be there, making sure nothing happens."
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HEADLINE	02/09 UN report: AQ, ISIS safe haven Syria Idlib
SOURCE	https://nordicmonitor.com/2022/02/the-un-report-indicates-al-qaeda-and-isis-enjoys-safe-haven-in-turkish-controlled-idlib/
GIST	<p>A recent UN report on al-Qaeda and the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) shows that armed jihadists continue to operate in Syria's Idlib region, which is under the control of the Turkish Armed Forces.</p> <p>"The Idlib de-escalation zone remains important for ISIL as a strategic location providing limited safe haven; some ISIL activity is noted near the Turkish border. Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) remains the predominant terrorist group in the north-west of the Syrian Arab Republic and in control of Idlib," the report states.</p> <p>According to the report, which was submitted to the UN Security Council on February 3, 2022 by experts assigned to the UN Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team, HTS, formerly known as the Al-Nusrah Front, has up to 15,000 fighters and generates revenue mainly through taxation in the region. Some of the humanitarian aid sent to Idlib was diverted to HTS, the report also notes.</p> <p>Another group that operates in Idlib is the Turkistan Islamic Party (TIP), formerly known as the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), which commands a force of between 1,000 and 3,000 fighters. The UN received intelligence that TIP members operate under the command of HTS and collaborate with al-Qaeda groups such as Hurras al-Din (HAD) and Katiba al-Tawhid wal-Jihad (KTJ). The group has reportedly been seeking to recruit and send fighters to Central Asian countries and China for terrorist attacks.</p> <p>TIP established several training camps in Syria, recruiting and training foreign terrorist fighters. It also set up a staging area for the transit, funding and recruitment of fighters, among other logistical support.</p> <p>The UN report also drew attention to the risks associated with the jihadists who try to return to their home countries through Turkey. It highlighted the case of Yassine Lachiri, a Belgian-Moroccan ISIS fighter who was detained in Bulgaria in November 2021 after arriving from Turkey. Lachiri is an associate of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the mastermind of the 2015 Paris attacks. It remains a mystery as to how Lachiri managed to enter Bulgaria despite the fact that he received a prison sentence in Turkey.</p> <p>Turkey's name also came up in connection with Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant – Khorasan (ISIL-K), which controls some territory in Afghanistan. The group has demonstrated a continuing ability to mount sophisticated attacks, adding to the complexity of the security situation in Afghanistan, the UN said. One UN member state provided information to the UN stating that Ismatullah Khalezai, the alleged financial facilitator for ISIL-K, delivered approximately \$87,000 to the group in Afghanistan and personally smuggled an ISIS courier from Afghanistan into Turkey.</p> <p>The UN warned that Afghanistan has the potential to become a safe haven for Al-Qaeda, ISIS-K and a number of terrorist groups with ties to the Central Asia region and beyond. With regard to Africa, ISIS and al-Qaeda groups have continued to advance, the report noted, adding that those groups have successfully exploited local grievances and weak governance in West Africa, in particular in the Sahel, to command growing numbers of followers and resources.</p> <p>In Syria and Iraq, described as the ISIS core conflict zone, the jihadist group has evolved into a primarily rural insurgency, withstanding sustained counterterrorism pressure from forces in the region.</p> <p>According to the UN estimation, ISIS still possesses as much as \$50 million and continues to fund its operations in many places.</p>

	<p>On February 3, 2022 US military forces carried out a counterterrorism operation in Idlib province, killing Amir Muhammad Sa'id al Salbi al Mawla, also known by his nom de guerre Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi, the leader of ISIS. Qurayshi assumed the leadership after the US killed former ISIS leader leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi, again In Idlib, close to the Turkish border. He had been hiding in a town called Atme, located north of Idlib and just east of the border with Turkey. The area is controlled by HTS.</p> <p>Idlib remains the last rebel stronghold in Syria for anti-regime forces as well as terrorist groups. In 2017 it was designated one of four de-escalation zones in an agreement among Russia, Iran and Turkey. Since then multiple clashes have erupted, putting Turkish-Russian relations to the test. Turkey has shown unwillingness to rein in terrorist groups, especially HTS, which controls Idlib, while Russia has signaled time and again that it can help the Bashar al-Assad regime take over the province by force and unleash a new refugee influx to Turkey.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/09 Al Qaeda leader surfaces in video again
SOURCE	https://www.wionews.com/world/al-qaedas-zawahiri-surfaces-in-video-again-calls-on-muslims-to-champion-cause-of-oppressed-451610
GIST	<p>Al Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahiri released another anti-atheism video on Wednesday.</p> <p>SITE Intelligence Group which tracks terror-related activities on social media said the terrorist leader called on Muslims worldwide to champion the cause of the "oppressed" in the 32-minute video.</p> <p>Al-Zawahiri had released another video on February 4 in a series called "deal of the century or the crusade of the century".</p> <p>The whereabouts of the Al Qaeda chief is unknown with reports claiming he has been unwell for some time.</p> <p>In a video posted in November last year, al-Zawahiri had attacked United Nations for being hostile towards Islam stating that "the United Nations was created by the victorious powers in the Second World War with the aim of imposing a political system and doctrine on the entire world."</p> <p>The Al Qaeda leader had also posted a video during the 9/11 anniversary last year on Telegram with the title "Jerusalem will not be Judaized". However, Islamic State (IS) and other terrorist networks had cast doubts on the authenticity of the video.</p> <p>In the 9/11 video, Zawahiri had said 19 Mujahideen fighters had "wounded America's heart" referring to the attackers who carried out the attacks on September 2001 in New York and Washington.</p> <p>Zawahiri had succeeded Osama bin Laden after the Al Qaeda chief was killed in a US raid at his hideout in Abbottabad, Pakistan in May 2011.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Belgium anti-terror raids: 13 arrests
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/business/police-arrest-13-in-belgium-after-anti-terror-raids/
GIST	<p>BRUSSELS (AP) — Police in Belgium detained 13 people on Tuesday following raids in and around the port city of Antwerp as part of an investigation into alleged terror activities.</p> <p>According to the federal prosecutor's office, the suspects were all part of the same group, which it described as close to "Salafist" circles. About 100 police officers were involved in the operation.</p> <p>The prosecutor's office did not reveal details of the group's plans, but said the police operation was not aimed at stopping an imminent threat of attack.</p>

	<p>The suspects will appear before an investigative judge who will decide whether they should remain in custody.</p> <p>Belgium has been hit by several terror attacks in the past decade, including suicide bombings in 2016 that killed 32 people and injured hundreds more in the Brussels subway and airport.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/07 NCTC: new app tracks terror-linked events
SOURCE	https://www.nextgov.com/it-modernization/2022/02/new-app-tracks-terrorism-linked-events-local-us-communities/361683/
GIST	<p>The National Counterterrorism Center or NCTC designed and launched a new mobile app and website that provide unclassified intelligence reports, training materials and breaking alert notifications tracking terrorist-associated events.</p> <p>Dubbed “aCTknowledge,” this new digital tool was produced with—and explicitly for—U.S. law enforcement officers, first responders and homeland security professionals. It will be frequently updated based on their feedback going forward.</p> <p>“This is a tremendous evolution of our information-sharing effort,” an NCTC expert who helped build the platform told reporters during a press briefing on Monday.</p> <p>That official was among several who shared details about aCTknowledge on the call.</p> <p>As a component of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, NCTC connects specialists from different government hubs for counterterrorism aims, captures and analyzes intelligence, monitors national and international communications for threats, manages massive lists of incidents and individuals with potential links to terrorism, and more. The center was formed at the recommendation of the 9/11 Commission.</p> <p>“After [Sept. 11, 2001], it was obviously determined that we do need to be sharing info and part of the reason the [NCTC] was formed was to have a place where that info could reside and that we can push it out and have the relationship with the community,” another expert explained during the briefing. “So on our end, we do want to share when we can the information that's needed to protect communities.”</p> <p>The new aCTknowledge resource is meant to be a one-stop-shop for NCTC analyses, training materials and real-time alerts, among other assets. Users can search for specific topics of interest, which will also inform new features it could include down the line.</p> <p>In this first release, the tool is available to the center’s federal and military partners—but officials confirmed that “in the coming months” it will be rolled out to state, tribal, local and other players that NCTC works with. As a mobile application, aCTknowledge is now currently listed in the Apple App Store, and it will soon be offered in Google Play for use on Android devices. Besides the mobile option, it is also offered as a web portal to fit the needs of different types of users and first responders who function in different environments.</p> <p>Officials are required to register with their official government email address after downloading the application, and vetting information must also be submitted.</p> <p>“The information that the app will have is unclassified, for official use only,” an expert said on the call. “So, it's for people who need to use that information to keep their community safe.”</p> <p>Previously, the center would disperse a great deal of its information to its stakeholders via email and on listserves. Officials believe offering alerts and incident updates that can be accessed on handheld devices in real-time will help boost response and protection.</p>

“Our ability to send push notifications to partners using the app is really going to change the community in general, because we’ll be able to immediately level-set everyone’s understanding of counterterrorism event as it occurs,” one said.

To help visualize its potential impact, another individual mentioned the recent [hostage situation](#) that starkly unfolded at a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, where an hours-long standoff ensued.

“Once we do the later rollout to first responders, [and] state and local [partners], one thing that’ll be neat about the app is when you have an incident like, say—there was the Colleyville incident a few weeks ago—if you’re law enforcement in another part of the country, you can be tracking that in real-time and thinking ‘okay, well, do I need to be looking at synagogues as well, or something like that,’ to really make use of the information in a practical way,” they explained.

NCTC officials repeatedly emphasized that they worked with and were informed by teams from the New Jersey State Police, the Jackson Fire and Rescue Service and the Las Vegas Metro Police Department—and multiple others—in developing and refining aCTknowledge.

The platform will also continue to be expanded and updated with new features based on user input now that it is in use, the experts noted. Audio and video capabilities aren’t yet offered in the tool, for example, but they’ll likely be included in the future.

“We aren’t just endlessly building,” an official said. “We’re building with purpose.”

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HEADLINE	02/08 US mired in heightened threat environment
SOURCE	https://www.homelandsecuritynewswire.com/dr20220208-u-s-mired-in-heightened-threat-environment-dhs
GIST	<p>The prevalence of conspiracy theories and bad or misleading information, online and in social media forums, is keeping the United States in a state of heightened alert when it comes to possible terror attacks.</p> <p>The Department of Homeland Security issued an updated National Terrorism Advisory System bulletin Monday, warning that while many of the top threat streams have changed little over the past year, almost all of them are being amplified by the information environment.</p> <p>DHS said the proliferation of false narratives aimed at undermining trust in public institutions, combined with growing calls for violence by both domestic actors and foreign terrorist organizations, “has increased the volatility, unpredictability, and complexity of the threat environment.”</p> <p>Specifically, the updated DHS bulletin cites “widespread online proliferation of false or misleading narratives regarding unsubstantiated widespread election fraud and COVID-19,” which it says is being amplified by “malign foreign powers.”</p> <p>The bulletin also warns of continued calls for violence against soft targets — public venues and gatherings that often have limited security — including houses of worship such as churches, mosques and synagogues.</p> <p>“The recent attack on a synagogue in Colleyville, Texas highlights the continuing threat of violence based upon racial or religious motivations, as well as threats against faith-based organizations,” according to the bulletin.</p> <p>Recent threats against historically Black colleges and universities also “cause concern and may inspire extremist threat actors to mobilize to violence,” the bulletin said.</p> <p>Officials have also expressed concern about domestic groups advocating violence in the run-up to the 2022 midterm elections in November and the possibility that foreign terrorists, especially those sympathetic to the Islamic State group, will launch attacks in retaliation for the death of IS leader Amir Muhammad Sa’id Abdal-Rahman al-Mawla last week.</p>

	<p>“DHS remains committed to proactively sharing timely information and intelligence about the evolving threat environment with the American public,” Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said in a statement Monday.</p> <p>“We also remain committed to working with our partners across every level of government and in the private sector to prevent all forms of terrorism and targeted violence, and to support law enforcement efforts to keep our communities safe,” he added.</p> <p>Earlier this year, the U.S. Justice Department announced it was forming a new unit to help investigate and prosecute domestic terrorism, pointing to rising caseload.</p> <p>According to the FBI, domestic violent extremists carried out four attacks in 2021, leading to 13 deaths.</p> <p>An unclassified U.S. intelligence assessment released last March also warned of a broad threat from domestic extremists, focusing its concern on lone offenders and small cells, all subscribing to a diverse set of violent ideologies but “galvanized by recent political and societal events.”</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Afghan women rights activists go quiet
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/08/afghanistan-taliban-women-protests/
GIST	<p>KABUL — It had been six days since the two women’s rights activists were abducted. Now, Taliban fighters were on Masooma Hemmat’s street, searching for her. She was inside her house, along with another activist, when a neighbor called to warn her. When Hemmat heard the word “Taliban,” she hung up in fear.</p> <p>“I was looking for a way to escape,” Hemmat, 28, recalled. “I thought that we, too, were going to be taken and disappeared.”</p> <p>Even as the Taliban tries to persuade the world to recognize and financially support its government, it has embarked on a violent crackdown on dissent. In recent weeks, Taliban fighters have targeted women’s rights activists, especially those protesting the Taliban’s denial of their basic rights.</p> <p>Armed militants have beaten female demonstrators, sprayed pepper spray in their faces and shocked them with electric prods, according to a half-dozen activists interviewed by The Washington Post. Other women have received threatening calls and text messages and have been harassed on social media. Several said they were followed by militants in an apparent effort to intimidate them. Many went into hiding. All agreed to speak on the record because their faces and names are known to the Taliban.</p> <p>Then two weeks ago, the threat escalated. Armed gunmen, on the evening of Jan. 19, took into custody two well-known activists, Tamana Paryani and Parwana Ibrahimkhil, in separate operations. Paryani and her three sisters were abducted from their third-floor apartment, while Ibrahimkhil was taken with her brother-in-law in another part of Kabul, according to human rights activists and the United Nations. Three days earlier, both women protested in the streets against the Taliban. Neither has been heard from since their disappearance.</p> <p>“Through the abduction of these women, the Taliban are sending a clear message about how society should function, who is the authority and the power, and how people should obey it,” said Sahar Fetrat, assistant researcher for Human Rights Watch’s women’s rights division. “It’s about stopping any kind of activism, any kind of protest against the Taliban.”</p> <p>The targeting of female activists has continued even after a meeting late last month in Oslo, where Taliban representatives met with special envoys from the United States and European nations to seek more humanitarian aid and diplomatic recognition. The envoys, in a statement, urged the Taliban to “stop the alarming increase of human rights violations, including arbitrary detentions (to include recent detentions of women’s rights activists), forced disappearances” and other abuses.</p>

On Thursday, the U.N. Assistance Mission in Afghanistan announced in a tweet that two more women's activists reportedly had been detained by the Taliban in the past 24 hours. At least eight women linked to activism are believed to have vanished in recent weeks, according to protesters.

Khalid Zadran, a Taliban police spokesman, said that the police had not arrested Paryani or Ibrahimkhil, and that "our police didn't threaten anyone through calls or messages." Qari Saeed Khosti, a spokesman for the Interior Ministry, also denied any role, saying, "This issue has nothing to do with us." Two spokesmen for the Taliban's intelligence agency did not respond to requests for comment.

In Oslo, the Taliban's acting foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, blamed rogue elements inside the Taliban who may have detained the women, according to Afghan media. The incidents, he said, were under investigation.

A video of Paryani has emerged on social media in which she is seen screaming for help, declaring that Taliban fighters are banging on her door. "Help please, the Taliban have come to our home," she's heard saying in the footage. On social media, some Taliban officials and loyalists declared that the video was fake and a ploy to seek asylum abroad.

But an employee at the building where Paryani lived with her three sisters, a short walk from a bustling road, said in an interview that seven to 10 Taliban fighters arrived around 7:30 p.m. and began to bang on her door. "She was screaming and shouting for help," said the employee, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for his own security.

The fighters, he said, then "broke the door down," dragged Paryani and her sisters to the street, and took them around the building on foot. "She is a good person," he said, referring to Paryani. "We don't know why they would arrest her."

A person who identified himself as Ibrahimkhil's brother answered their mother's cellphone. "I can confirm the Taliban arrested them, but I don't know where they are and in what situation they are in," he said. He added that he could not say more because "the Taliban threatened us not to speak with anyone."

The U.N. human rights agency last week said in a statement that it found the disappearances troubling, part of "a pattern of arbitrary arrests and detentions" of civil society activists, journalists and others.

The authorities should take measures to ensure the activists' "safe and immediate release" and hold those responsible accountable, Ravina Shamdasani, spokeswoman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, told journalists in Geneva.

"The lack of clear information on the location and well-being of these and other individuals perpetuates a climate of fear and uncertainty," she said.

Fleeing the Taliban

For weeks, Hemmat has lived in such a climate.

After hanging up the phone, she peered out from the balcony and saw a group of Taliban fighters approaching the house, Hemmat said. She went to a closet and found two burqas and handed one to her activist friend, Shamail Tawana Nasiri. The women put them on.

"We went out the back door, jumped into a taxi and drove to my relative's house," Hemmat recalled.

Both earned college degrees and had jobs in the former government, beneficiaries of two decades of Western presence in Afghanistan that enhanced women's rights and participation in society.

Today, in most areas, girls cannot attend school beyond the sixth grade. With the exception of those working in the health sector and education, women are banned from government jobs. No woman is

among the 33 cabinet ministers of the Taliban interim government, which shut down the Ministry of Women's Affairs and turned it into the office of the religious morality police. Women are now required to take a male relative with them on long journeys.

"When we lost our jobs, and after they implemented restrictions on us, that made us go outside and protest," Hemmat said. "Our future was either life or death."

The peaceful protests for equal rights for women were often small, sometimes no more than 20 to 30 women, but they attracted media attention. Taliban fighters would push the participants with their rifle butts. They arrested and beat up local journalists covering the protests.

By last month, the Taliban had adopted harsher tactics. On Jan. 13, Hemmat and Nasiri joined a group of activists calling for an investigation into the abduction of Alia Azizi, a female prison official in Herat who has been missing for more than three months. The protest didn't last long.

"The Taliban tore up our banners," Hemmat said, as Nasiri nodded in agreement. " 'If you don't leave we'll fire on you,' they said as they pointed their guns at us."

The next day, a Taliban loyalist tweeted out a photo of Nasiri and wrote a message addressed to Taliban intelligence officials, urging them to arrest her and other activists. He accused her of sedition, saying that she will organize protests "until the collapse of the system."

Nasiri, 24, stayed inside her home, fearful of being arrested.

Then, on Jan. 19, Paryani and Ibrahimkhil disappeared.

"When I saw the video of Tamana crying and calling for help, I felt hopeless," Nasiri recalled. "I couldn't sleep that night. I kept looking out the window thinking the Taliban will come to my house and arrest me."

On Jan. 25, as the Oslo talks were taking place, Nasiri felt more confident about leaving her house. She went to Hemmat's house for tea. That's when their worst fears came true.

Nowadays, they keep a very low profile.

"We are still hiding," Hemmat said.

'They harassed and beat us'

Sidika Tariq, 27, was hit in the back with the butt of a gun during a recent protest, she said. The Taliban, she added, warned the women: "We are an Islamic government. Your demands are illegal."

Later, on Jan. 29, she was on her way to Kabul University to speak with another activist. Armed gunmen stopped her and demanded that she get into their truck.

"They threatened me with their guns," Tariq said. "They were pushing me and saying 'Come with us.' I was screaming and shouting. I beat them with my bag."

A crowd soon gathered. The gunmen released her and left. She said she wasn't sure who they were, though she suspects they were Taliban.

Feroza Uruzgani, 37, a mother of four with a master's degree, was with Paryani and Ibrahimkhil at their last protest on Jan. 16. About 25 women had gathered to march toward Kabul University.

A large contingent of Taliban fighters, she said, was present, as if the militants had learned about their plans. As they marched, some fighters pointed their guns at the protesters. Human Rights Watch reported that some were calling the women "puppets of the West" and "whores."

“They sprayed gas on us,” Uruzgani recalled. “They harassed and beat us. They shocked protesters with electricity sticks.”

Human Rights Watch researchers said the chemical substance was probably pepper spray.

After the abductions, Uruzgani has left her home twice, covered up in sunglasses and a headscarf. She has deleted from her phone most videos of protests, in case she gets stopped by the Taliban. Sometimes, she removes her sim card and shuts down her phone, worried that the militants are able to tap her conversations.

“We are psychologically under pressure,” said Uruzgani, who lost her job at a nonprofit working to assist women when the Taliban entered Kabul.

Nevertheless, all of the activists interviewed said they want to continue to fight for their rights. Some have held news conferences inside their houses with a handful of journalists. Others have taken to social media to defy the Taliban.

Since Jan. 16, there have been no street protests, the activists said.

All said they feel abandoned by the world. Denunciations from the United Nations and Western officials have done nothing to prevent the Taliban from targeting female activists. More tangible pressure needs to be applied, they said, such as refusing to meet or talk with Taliban officials about diplomatic recognition or humanitarian funding, denying them legitimacy until they improve their treatment of women.

“We have learned from our protests,” said Nafisa Bahar, 29, a leading activist. “If we don’t have strong support from the international community, our movement will not be effective. We will have more victims if we continue this way.”

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HEADLINE	02/09 Tensions rise on Afghan-Pakistan border
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/09/we-are-happy-to-fight-deadly-tension-on-the-afghanistan-pakistan-border-taliban
GIST	<p>The Pakistani-Afghan border, running along Britain’s colonial-era Durand Line, is a centre of the increasing tensions between Islamabad and the Taliban, with a rise in attacks since the group came to power in Kabul.</p> <p>Five Pakistani soldiers were killed on Sunday at a north-western border post in Khurram district by militants inside Afghanistan in an attack claimed by the Pakistani Taliban, Tehreek-e-Taliban-Pakistan (TTP).</p> <p>After a ceasefire between the group and the Pakistani government collapsed within weeks, the Pakistani foreign minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, said Islamabad had told the Afghan Taliban leadership it considered TTP as a test case of its ability to control militants.</p> <p>“If the Taliban can’t address concerns of Pakistan, then who would trust them and their promise of cutting ties to al-Qaida and other such groups?” he asked.</p> <p>Pakistan previously clashed with the US-backed Afghan government over the border – which Afghanistan has never formally accepted – leaving many soldiers dead, so when the Taliban captured Kabul in summer 2021 it was celebrated in Pakistan by the prime minister, Islamist political parties and retired military officers.</p> <p>The Taliban’s return to power was seen as an opportunity for Pakistan to regain influence and also as a strategic victory over Delhi.</p>

The author and analyst Zahid Hussain, however, said the Afghan Taliban would not crack down on TTP bases in Nangarhar province, east of Kabul.

“In the beginning, Pakistani authorities believed the Taliban would serve Pakistan’s interests and [not] allow militants to use its soil against Pakistan. But it does not seem to be the case any more,” he said, adding that the extremists were emboldened by the Taliban’s victory in Afghanistan and aspired to do the same in Pakistan.

Pakistan started fencing the porous border in 2014 to contain cross-border terrorist attacks and smuggling. It says it has fenced more than 90% of the border, but Hussain said militants were able to enter Pakistan and carry out attacks where the border remained unchecked and unfenced.

In at least three separate incidents, Talib fighters have been seen breaking the fencing and threatening Pakistani soldiers in border areas.

In one widely shared video from 19 December, a Talib commander in Nangarhar is heard saying to Pakistani soldiers: “If you come a step further, I will fight you here. We are happy to fight you.” A similar incident was recorded last year on 30 December in Nimruz, a province in south-west Afghanistan.

The Taliban’s defence ministry spokesperson said in a video posted to Twitter in January that Pakistan had no right to fence the border and divide ethnic Pashtuns living on either side.

Amid mounting clashes and tensions on the border, Pakistan’s national security adviser, Moeed Yusuf, visited Afghanistan for two days on 29 January. Both countries announced plans to form a high-level committee to address the issue.

Drawn by the British empire, the 2,640km (1,640-mile) land border between Afghanistan and Pakistan has been perpetually disputed.

Abubakar Siddique, an author and expert on Pakistan and Afghanistan, said that after the Taliban – an Islamist group – seized power, many in Pakistan thought they would not behave as an Afghan nationalist group. He said people were wrong to make such an assumption.

“The anti-Pakistan sentiments are high in Afghanistan because of Islamabad’s perceived role as a main driver of instability. In addition, no Afghan government has ever formally accepted the Durand Line as a permanent border, which remains a highly emotional issue,” he said.

“Their actions along the Durand Line aim at gaining domestic legitimacy. The Taliban also want to do away with the almost universal perception that they are a Pakistani proxy group.”

The Taliban are not only seeking domestic legitimacy amid a humanitarian crisis – a more porous border benefits their financial interests.

A Pakistani government official posted on the Afghan border anonymously told the Guardian that “as many of the areas have been fenced, we have seen a decrease in human and drug smuggling. Of course, the Taliban benefit from these illegal businesses and now the smugglers use different routes where there is no fencing.”

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Suspicious, Unusual

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HEADLINE	02/08 Los Angeles area rare February heat alert
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2022/02/08/excessive-heat-california-los-angeles/

We may be in the heart of winter, but that isn't stopping the atmosphere from cooking up some extreme heat for parts of the West Coast. Multiple National Weather Service offices in California have opted to issue excessive heat watches ahead of climbing temperatures beginning Wednesday, an unusual measure that may be a first of its kind for February.

The Weather Service warns of "dangerously hot conditions with temperatures up to 90 degrees possible," noting that visitors from other states unaccustomed to the toasty weather may be at a greater risk for heat-related illnesses.

The [Super Bowl is Sunday](#) at SoFi Stadium in Inglewood, Calif., with the Cincinnati Bengals facing the Los Angeles Rams.

Excessive-heat watches are issued when "extremely dangerous" heat appears likely within one to three days, according to the Weather Service. Sixteen million people reside within the alert areas.

Southern California is no stranger to hot weather — Los Angeles averages five days annually that hit 90 degrees or higher — but such temperatures are particularly unusual at this time of year. In fact, the city has recorded only seven 90-degree days during the winter months of December, January or February since 1948. That last time it happened was Jan. 31, 2003, when the high was 91 degrees.

The excessive-heat watch covers coastal Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, as well as the interior valleys. The San Gabriel and San Fernando valleys are included in the watch, as is downtown Los Angeles. Burbank, Anaheim, Santa Ana and Newport Beach are all within the watch area.

It's the first time since at least 2006, when software began tabulating weather alert issuance, that an excessive-heat watch has been hoisted during February in Southern California. In fact, all other excessive-heat watches issued by the Weather Service office in Los Angeles have fallen between May and October; for the San Diego office, between April and October.

The setup isn't exactly a classic one for extreme heat in Southern California, but it does meet the requirements for warming offshore flow. Multiple areas of high pressure are banked to the north, one in southern British Columbia and the other over Saskatchewan and Manitoba. That, coupled with weak low pressure draped across the southern United States, will funnel air westward over the Sierra Nevada.

As air slides downhill into the lowlands and the Inland Empire and deserts of Southern California, it will undergo a process called adiabatic compression — greater air pressure near sea level will squeeze and compress the air, which induces a warming and drying. By the time parcels of air make it to Los Angeles between Wednesday and Friday, they'll be sitting in the upper 80s to near 90 degrees.

The dry atmosphere will be ineffective at trapping heat overnight, permitting temperatures to fall into the upper 50s and allowing some respite from the day's anomalous warmth.

The Weather Service expects Los Angeles to snag highs of 87 degrees on Wednesday and Friday and perhaps make it up to 89 degrees on Thursday. That would flirt with record territory Wednesday and Friday and beat out Thursday's record of 85, set in 2016. Record-keeping dates to 1944.

Average highs in Los Angeles for early to mid-February range between 65 and 66 degrees. Afternoon temperatures late in the workweek will soar 15 to 25 degrees or more above average.

Los Angeles International Airport has never logged a reading above 92 degrees during February. It's improbable, but not impossible, that monthly records will be tied in a few areas.

Oxnard, Calif., farther northwest, is likely to remain a few degrees below records. The predicted highs for are 80 on Wednesday, 82 on Thursday and 77 on Friday; 88, 84 and 87 are the numbers to beat.

	<p>The Weather Service office in Los Angeles, in its online technical forecast discussion, did note that the forecasts do not necessarily meet the conventional requirements for pulling the trigger on an excessive-heat warning (typically issued after a watch when dangerously hot conditions are imminent), but it emphasized the hazard posed by the heat nonetheless.</p> <p>“Heat risk grids are quite a bit below thresholds, in part due to relatively cool overnight temperatures in most areas,” the NWS wrote. “But the afternoon highs will pose heat risks for people enjoying outdoor activities each afternoon [Wednesday] through Friday.”</p> <p>The hot weather may persist into the weekend, with highs in the mid- to upper 80s forecast in Southern California. The heat may well coincide with the Super Bowl, with kickoff set for 3:30 p.m. local time. However, SoFi Stadium features a state-of-the-art roof made up of multiple operable panels that can open or close to facilitate cooling.</p> <p>The heat is occurring on the heels of California’s second-driest January on record. Dry conditions tend to intensify hot weather as a land surface stripped of its moisture heats up more readily. Three of California’s five driest Januaries on record have occurred in the past eight years.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Man missing; last seen in Seattle condo
SOURCE	https://www.kiro7.com/news/local/police-searching-missing-seattle-man/VBOUCESDVRA5DDRKCF7QTOHMWM/
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — There’s a mystery inside the Trio Condos in Seattle.</p> <p>Saurabh Gupte and his family live on the 6th floor, but since Monday morning he’s been missing.</p> <p>The strangest part is that he was never seen leaving the building.</p> <p>“Something has happened,” says his wife Shraddha Gupte. “I don’t know what happened but I’m requesting to everyone of you please please please help me.”</p> <p>His wife says he took out the recycling Monday morning, security cameras in the building capturing him in the parking garage.</p> <p>She says he then headed back to the 6th floor to grab the trash and take it to the chute down the hall.</p> <p>That was the last time anyone saw him.</p> <p>“He’s really calm, simple and kind guy,” says Shraddha. “He’s a loving husband, loving son, he’s a loving father. We just had a baby. He’s 4 months old.”</p> <p>At the time of his disappearance, Gupte says her husband didn’t have his keys wallet or phone with him, and all he was wearing was a shirt, sweatpants and flip flops.</p> <p>She has no reason to believe he just left and is worried something may have happened to him inside the Belltown condominium.</p> <p>“This is just a nightmare for all of us, you know? Just a nightmare,” she says.</p> <p>Now their family and friends are posting signs and raising awareness of Saurabh’s disappearance hoping that someone will recognize his photo and help reunite this family.</p> <p>“There’s some hope that I can find him, we will find him together. He’s somewhere here and we will surely find with everyone’s help,” says Shraddha.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Seattle Mazda drivers radios stuck to KUOW
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/thanks-to-a-glitch-some-seattle-mazda-drivers-cant-tune-their-radios-away-from-kuow/
GIST	<p>It was on Sunday afternoon, Jan. 30, driving in Ballard, that Dave Welding entered the world of car computers gone amok.</p> <p>He drives a 2016 Mazda hatchback. It turns out that about the same time, the same thing was happening to other local Mazda owners who had this in common:</p> <p>They drove a 2014 to 2017 model Mazda, and they had tuned into KUOW, 94.9 on the FM dial, the NPR station.</p> <p>That's all it took.</p> <p>Somehow the signal the station sent to the modern HD Radio that's part of the Mazda infotainment center had, as Welding puts it, "fried" a major component.</p> <p>That frying made the radios only play KUOW. No chance of catching a little classic rock or some Dori soliloquies. KUOW. Forever.</p> <p>Also gone from the infotainment center were such features as Bluetooth, navigation, the clock and vehicle stats — "Many of the features I paid for when I bought it new," Welding says.</p> <p>It was as if the infotainment center had decided to team up with the ghost of HAL. You remember that malfunctioning, soft-spoken and ultimately sinister artificial intelligence computer from "2001: A Space Odyssey"?</p> <p>That movie was released 54 years ago; now, there are just more HALs out there.</p> <p>As the radio remained frozen, the rebooting visuals on the screen in the middle of the dashboard were just too distracting when he was driving. Welding ended up covering the spot with cardboard.</p> <p>"The lower right field of my vision was seeing like a TV screen going on and off," he says. Over and over, the screen showed the Mazda logo, then there would be a flash, then the logo split into five new logos.</p> <p>That's all it took. That signal somehow affected older software in 2014-2017 Mazdas, says Mazda North American Operations.</p> <p>Welding says that when he contacted Lee Johnson Mazda of Seattle, "They told me that there's nothing they can do about it, that I needed a new CMU unit, that it cost \$1,500 and that they didn't have the part."</p> <p>The Mazda dealer referred calls for comment to Mazda corporate headquarters.</p> <p>Lorenzo Pieruccioni, service manager at Mazda of Olympia, says he's had seven to 10 customers with the rebooting problems. He tells them their CMU is corrupted.</p> <p>That stands for "Connectivity Master Unit," and it controls the video and audio signals to that infotainment system. That's the \$1,500 gizmo that is not available and who knows when it will be.</p> <p>His assessment: "It's just weird."</p> <p>On Tuesday evening, Mazda emailed that it had "distributed service alerts" to dealers, that "impacted customers" should contact their local dealer "who can submit a goodwill request to the Mazda Warranty department on their behalf, order the parts, and schedule a free repair when the parts arrive."</p>

About when the parts might arrive.

Supply chain!

Who knows, especially with the semiconductor shortage.

Stephanie Marquis, of Olympia, a 2015 Mazda hatchback owner, posted on Reddit about the complaints, “Seattle dealer said they’ve had tons since last week. I find it hard to believe it’s the cause of one station.”

In an interview, she said the rebooting began two weeks ago. She had hope one night that the infotainment center had fixed itself.

Sure.

“One night I was driving and my back camera came on for a few minutes. I thought this is awful driving with this on,” she says.

Then the system shut down completely. Then it came on and she could change radio stations. She parked the car and when returning a couple of hours later, was hopeful the infotainment center would work. But, no dice. “It doesn’t work. Hasn’t worked since.”

As to how KUOW got involved in all this, that’s not quite clear.

Dane Johnson, director of operations at KUOW, says the station has been in contact with one of those companies with one of those names that don’t quite explain what they do. It’s called Xperi Holding Corporation, of San Jose, California, and it’s the parent company of HD Radio.

The latter is the technology that allows for digital radio broadcasting, and is at the heart of an infotainment center such as the one in Mazdas. Somewhere in transmission between KUOW and HD Radio something happened.

Xperi issued this one statement: “KUOW has made us aware of this and we are assisting in addressing it promptly.”

Want a perspective on all this?

It’s from professor Dan Tappan, of Eastern Washington University’s Department of Computer Science and Electrical Engineering.

He says he’s planning to use the fiasco as an example in his software classes.

Even low-end vehicles these days are approaching 100 million lines of code, and 100 electronic control units, according to a June paper published by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

All that computerization, says Tappan, is great for anti-lock brakes, air bags and stability control.

As for the infotainment side of things, well ...

“Most people don’t use them, don’t care,” Tappan says. “Often they are the areas most vulnerable to failure.”

Mazda headquarters says the problem was that KUOW “sent image files with no extension.”

The files would be maybe the album cover of a song being played on the radio, or its release date, “to, quote, improve the experience,” says Tappan.

What could have happened, says the professor, is that the station sent a file that didn't identify its format, whether a Word document or image such as a JPEG.

The computer in the car should not have ever opened the file.

But it might have tried, just trying to be a good computer, as HAL thought he was, misinterpreting the format, executing it badly and, well, \$1,500.

Welding says he's thinking about decorating the cardboard on his infotainment screen. "Something calming," he says.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Hamsters can transmit Covid to humans?
SOURCE	https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/feb/08/hamsters-can-transmit-covid-to-humans-data-suggests
GIST	<p>Pet hamsters can transmit Covid to humans and are the likely source of a recent outbreak of the Delta variant in Hong Kong, data suggests.</p> <p>The research confirms fears that a pet shop was the source of a recent Covid outbreak in the city, which has seen at least 50 people infected and led to the culling of more than 2,200 hamsters.</p> <p>However, virologists emphasised that, although the pet trade could provide a route for viral spread, existing pet hamsters are unlikely to pose a threat to their owners and should not be harmed.</p> <p>Many animals are susceptible to catching Covid from humans, but until now, only one – the mink – has proved capable of transmitting it in the opposite direction. Hamsters are particularly vulnerable to the virus – dwarf Roborovski hamsters can die from it – so have been widely used as a model for studying the disease.</p> <p>Concerns that hamsters might also be capable of infecting humans first surfaced when a 23-year-old worker at the Little Boss pet shop in Hong Kong tested positive for Covid on 15 January – the city's first Delta variant diagnosis for more than three months. A woman who visited the pet shop was also infected, and other members of her family tested positive in the days that followed.</p> <p>In response, public-health officials swabbed hundreds of rodents at the pet shop and at the warehouse supplying it. Viral genetic material or antibodies were detected in 15 of the 28 Syrian hamsters, but in none of the dwarf hamsters, mice, guinea pigs, rabbits or chinchillas tested. None of the hamsters had overt symptoms.</p> <p>After coronavirus was detected in the hamsters, Prof Leo Poon, a virologist at the University of Hong Kong, and his colleagues undertook further viral genome sequencing, which revealed that the hamsters were all infected with the Delta variant, and that their viruses were closely related. The nature of the mutations contained within these viruses suggested that transmission had been going on for some time – possibly since mid-November. The hamsters were imported from a supplier in the Netherlands during December and January.</p> <p>Meanwhile, analysis of samples from the pet shop worker and infected customer suggested that their viruses were closely related to the hamster viruses, but that they were unlikely to have transmitted the infection to each other.</p> <p>The study, which has not yet been peer-reviewed, is the first to provide "convincing evidence" that hamsters can become infected in real-life settings, and that they can pass the virus to humans, as well as to other hamsters.</p>

“Both genetic and epidemiological results strongly suggest that there were two independent hamster-to-human transmission [events], and that such events can lead to onward human transmission,” Poon said. “Importation of infected hamsters was the most likely source of virus infection.”

Most surprisingly, the virus could still “transmit between humans quite effectively” even after replicating in hamsters, Poon told the journal Nature. Although his results point to the global pet trade as a route for viral spread, people are still much more likely to be infected by each other than by their pets, he added.

Even so, the findings highlight the possibility that the virus may be spilling over to other animal species without being detected, providing an opportunity for further mutation and potential spillover back to humans. They therefore “highlight the need for awareness, surveillance and for appropriate quarantine and control policies for the pet animal trade”, said Poon.

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Crime, Criminals

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HEADLINE	02/09 Watchdog: largest global wage theft
SOURCE	https://www.vice.com/en/article/akvny4/garment-workers-karnataka-india-wage-theft
GIST	<p>Top U.S. brands like Walmart, Abercrombie & Fitch, and Nike source their clothes from Indian factories that refused to pay workers nearly \$60 million over the course of the pandemic, a labor-rights watchdog says. The crisis left some households unable to buy basic staples like rice, meat, and vegetables, or pay off their debts.</p> <p>In total, more than 1,000 clothing factories in the southern Indian state of Karnataka, a garment-producing hub in the country, failed to give their laborers a legal monthly minimum wage increase of 417.60 rupees—or about \$5.60, according to the Worker Rights Consortium. The modest pay hike, which went into effect in April 2020, would have helped approximately 400,000 workers, mostly women, cover day-to-day living costs like housing and food. It also would have gone toward paying off loans, according to advocates. Many workers had to take on debt to buy the expensive smartphones their children needed to attend classes online during lockdowns.</p> <p>“This is the largest wage theft we’re aware of anywhere in the global industry in terms of the total impact on workers,” said Ben Hensler, general counsel and deputy director for policy and research at the Worker Rights Consortium, which monitors labor rights globally. “What’s extraordinary here is the fact that all the garment factories, with few exceptions, in an entire state have all been violating the minimum wage openly for two years at this point.”</p> <p>The Karnataka factories supply apparel to top global brands, including European fast-fashion giants like H&M and Zara as well as all-American shops like Gap. Garment workers had originally hoped to appeal to retailers directly for help, but their efforts didn’t go anywhere until they approached advocacy groups, according to Hensler.</p> <p>In fact, many of the companies only publicly responded to the crisis in the last month or so—and major suppliers have only just started to commit to repayment in the past several days.</p> <p>“Brands are basically happy to look the other way when hundreds of thousands of the workers who make their products are being denied wages that they need for daily survival,” Hensler said. “To allow that to go on unchecked for months—nearly two years—until the brands are called publicly to account for it—I think it says a lot about the thinness of the commitments that they claim to have for the welfare of the workers.”</p> <p>In the end, Western corporations essentially control the fates of scores of garment workers of color, predominantly women. It’s what Madhumita Dutta, an assistant geography professor at Ohio State University, calls the “racialized nature of this power asymmetry” in the garment industry.</p>

“We give this unconscious mandate for this kind of stuff to happen as a society,” Dutta said. “It's invisible. We don't want to know and see it.”

Pandemic problems

Laborers' wages in Karnataka consist of both a daily basic rate of pay and another rate, called the “variable dearness allowance,” which reflects the cost of living. Because of the pandemic, the garment factories said they simply didn't have the money to pay the increase for the second rate, experts said.

Initially, the state government had postponed the pay hike, but the Karnataka High Court determined in September 2020 that the suppliers had to pay their workers the proper wage, according to the Worker Rights Consortium. Yet Karnataka's apparel factories still stalled, saying [the issue was pending in the courts.](#)

The pandemic has hurt garment workers in other ways—making the withheld wages in Karnataka an even worse slap in the face.

Starting in March, apparel factories in India completely locked down for a while to control the spread of COVID-19. Many American and European brands also canceled or delayed their orders after seeing sales plunge in the first few months of the public health emergency.

As a result, some factories were forced to shut down or lay people off. Many workers around the world went hungry.

Even in good economic times, fashion brands force their suppliers to keep costs low to remain competitive. Garment factories have been made to work faster and for worse profit margins over the past several years, and laborers' wages sometimes end up getting cut, according to Dutta, who collaborated on a 2019 garment supply-chain study focused on India. For example, 80% of workers there said their wages couldn't cover their living expenses, according to the study.

“There is a very intense squeeze on pricing and sourcing time that is creating this intense pressure,” Dutta said. “This is created by the firms on top, which goes down the supply chain, and ultimately impacts the wages and work conditions of the factory workers.”

In the case of Karnataka, garment laborers did try going straight to the brands about the wage theft, according to Manodeep Guha, the Worker Rights Consortium's field director for South Asia. They didn't hear back. So the consortium stepped in and began to write to the companies, with the goal of getting the factories to pay the proper wages.

“These brands have been profiting from completely inhumane labor practices,” said Meg Lewis, campaigns director at Labour Behind the Label, a UK representative of the global Clean Clothes Campaign, which is putting the heat on British clothing brands. “They have a responsibility to ensure that their business practices don't result in human rights violations like this. Brands are the primary profit-makers in any supply chain.”

Repaying workers

Last month, the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, a London-based group that tracks companies' human rights efforts, also started publicly reaching out to 22 companies that sourced clothing from Karnataka and worked with factories accused of wage theft, posting their replies online. Companies mostly offered vague responses that they expected their suppliers to comply with local wage laws and brands' codes of conduct, without specifically detailing concrete steps to see that workers were repaid.

Walmart, for example, responded that it would reach out to manufacturers to “reinforce” expectations. Levi Strauss said it was following up with each supplier individually, with the goal of getting them to make back payments as soon as possible. Nike promised it was “monitoring” the situation.

Still, advocates didn't see immediate changes. Only five brands indicated that workers in their supply chain had started to receive some of their due wages, including Abercrombie & Fitch and Inditex, the owner of Zara, according to the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre.

On Jan. 19, the American Apparel & Footwear Association also sent a letter to the Clothing Manufacturers Association of India pressuring the organization to make its members pay legal wages to workers going forward. The U.S. association warned brands' reputations were at risk—as well as the sector's relationship with Karnataka.

Factories have only started to take serious action in the past few weeks, though.

On Feb. 1, Shahi Exports, the state's largest supplier with tens of thousands of workers, announced it would pay back wages, as well as the proper rate moving forward. Shahi Exports did not respond to VICE News' request for comment but denied in a letter to Business & Human Rights Resource Centre researchers that it had been non-compliant or opposed to minimum wage laws, and said that the industry had been waiting for legal proceedings to conclude.

Some brands have also been better at addressing the situation than others, according to Hensler. Gap and PVH, the owner of Tommy Hilfiger and Calvin Klein, were persistent in recent efforts to make Shahi pay workers back some \$10 million, Hensler said—with roughly half of that money coming down to laborers by Feb. 10.

"PVH and Gap deserve a lot of credit for achieving the breakthrough of securing Shahi's commitment to pay the proper wage and compensate its workers," Hensler said.

Asked for comment, a spokesperson for PVH said the company "continues to be in extensive dialogue with all relevant parties, including civil society NGOs, labor rights organizations, and our suppliers in the region to bring a resolution to this important issue while it remains under legal review."

A spokesperson for Gap said the company had established a timeline with its suppliers "by which we expect full compliance" with the proper legal wages and back pay.

Abercrombie & Fitch, one of the several U.S. brands that advocates identified as getting its garments produced in Karnataka, did not immediately respond to VICE News' request for comment but told the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre that its vendor confirmed it would start payments of the 2020 wage increase in January.

Well-known fast-fashion behemoth H&M also told the Business & Human Rights Resource Centre it had "made it clear to our suppliers in Karnataka that they must pay the workers legally mandated minimum wages, including all arrears," or face "serious consequences."

Zara said in a statement to VICE News that "almost all" of the eight factories it worked with in Karnataka had paid or committed to paying workers the 2020 pay increase.

The company didn't respond when asked to identify the factories.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Beltway sniper seeks new sentencing
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/dc-md-wa/2022/02/08/dc-sniper-malvo-sentence/
GIST	<p>Convicted sniper Lee Boyd Malvo asked Maryland's highest court on Tuesday to throw out his six sentences of life without parole in that state and order a new sentencing hearing, even though he is imprisoned in Virginia with four life terms and might never end up in Maryland's custody.</p> <p>Malvo was 17 in October 2002 when he and 41-year-old John Allen Muhammad terrorized the Washington region, shooting 13 people, 10 of them fatally, in a series of sniper attacks. He was sentenced to a total of 10 life terms without parole, all consecutive, in Virginia and Maryland in the mid-2000s,</p>

before the U.S. Supreme Court and many states curtailed such sentences for defendants who committed their crimes as juveniles.

In Virginia, Malvo's sentences were changed in 2020 to life with the possibility of parole. Now 36, he is seeking new Maryland sentences that also would allow for parole — in case he is eventually paroled in Virginia and serves enough time in Maryland to become eligible for freedom.

Yet even if Malvo prevails, it could be virtually meaningless for him. Appearing Tuesday before Maryland's Court of Appeals, lawyers on both sides of the case said that if his life-without-parole sentences were thrown out, and he were someday transferred to Maryland, it is unclear how many years he would have to serve before a parole hearing. The required time could add up to more than a century.

"De facto life without parole," as one attorney put it.

Malvo, housed in Virginia's Red Onion prison, a supermax facility in Wise County near the North Carolina border, has mounted several legal challenges to his sentences in recent years. He has asserted that as an impressionable teenager two decades ago, he was psychologically manipulated by the much-older Muhammad, who was executed in Virginia in 2009. Malvo's lawyers say he is a mature, right-thinking adult now.

In a 2012 Alabama case, the Supreme Court said a sentence of life without parole for a youth is "excessive" and should be reserved for "the rare juvenile offender whose crime reflects irreparable corruption." In his argument Tuesday, Malvo's lawyer Kiran Iyer said that Maryland Judge James L. Ryan, who imposed the life-without-parole sentences in 2006, acknowledged at the time that Malvo was not incorrigible — but that was before the Supreme Court made it a factor in sentencing.

"Malvo's corrigibility was undisputed," Iyer told the appeals court. "It just had no legal significance in 2006. It has legal significance now. It means that his sentences are excessive."

Carrie J. Williams, an assistant state attorney general for Maryland, disagreed.

"Judge Ryan did not make an implicit finding that Malvo was reparable or corrigible," she wrote in a court filing. "Ryan noted that Malvo 'could have been somebody different' [and] 'could have been better,' but instead was a convicted murderer who 'knowingly, willingly, and voluntarily participated in the cowardly murders of innocent, defenseless human beings.'"

After the 2012 Supreme Court ruling and a related decision in 2016, Virginia eliminated life-without-parole for juveniles and modified sentences that had already been imposed, including Malvo's. In Maryland, the Juvenile Restoration Act, known as JURA, was passed last year, banning life terms for youths going forward. As for those who already had been sentenced, like Malvo, they are allowed to seek sentence review after serving 20 years of their terms.

Because JURA has yet to be fully interpreted by the courts, it is unclear whether the 20 years would apply cumulatively to each of Malvo's six consecutive life terms, meaning he would not live long enough to get a sentence review. For that reason, Iyer argued, his client should be granted a new sentencing hearing now, "to correct the illegal sentences" that were originally imposed.

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HEADLINE	02/08 US blocks Mexico fishing boats from ports
SOURCE	https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/02/08/mexico-gulf-illegal-fishing/
GIST	<p>MEXICO CITY — Along the U.S.-Mexico maritime border, the incursions occur almost daily. The boats are outfitted with small outboard motors, powerful enough to flee pursuing Border Patrol and Coast Guard vessels.</p> <p>The Mexican skiffs are loaded not with drugs or migrants, but with red snapper, sea turtles and sharks.</p>

U.S. officials say the threat posed by Mexican fishermen casting their nets illegally in U.S. waters has grown so acute that for the first time in years, they've banned Mexican fishing vessels from entering U.S. ports.

"These vessels ... will be denied port access and services," said Lauren Gaches, a spokesperson for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. She said the sanction was being applied in response to Mexico's "continued failure to combat unauthorized fishing activities by small hulled vessels in U.S. waters." It took effect Monday.

The U.S. Coast Guard apprehended 208 Mexican fishermen in 78 skiffs for illegal cross-border fishing in the 2021 fiscal year, seizing 15,484 pounds of marine life from the boats.

"It's not infrequent to detain the same offender 10, 20 or 30 times," said Lt. Cmdr. Dan Ippolito, commanding officer of Coast Guard Station South Padre Island.

The fishermen cast miles-long gillnets in the Gulf of Mexico, targeting sharks whose fins are sliced off and shipped to China and red snapper consumed across North America. Frequently, protected sea turtles are also ensnared in their nets as bycatch.

U.S. officials say they've been asking their Mexican counterparts for years to take action against illegal cross-border fishing, but little was done. By 2020, officials warned that if Mexico didn't do more, the fishermen could be sanctioned.

"Despite Mexico's efforts, these measures have not resulted in any decrease in the number of illegal lancha incursions into the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone," NOAA reported to Congress last year. "In fact, the number of incursions of Mexican vessels in 2020 was almost double that in 2019."

Mexico's foreign minister said Tuesday that he was working to prevent future incursions but suggested much of the cross-border fishing was accidental.

"Sometimes it is hard to determine the exact line," Marcelo Ebrard told reporters. "It's not something intentional."

Mexico's department of agriculture said it would be "ordering inspection and surveillance in the area" so access to U.S. ports would be restored. "Inter-institutional coordination has been resumed and strengthened," the department said in a statement.

U.S. officials have decried the lack of Mexican surveillance along the maritime border, and the relative ease with which fisherman can cross into U.S. waters, for years. As recently as last week, Texas game wardens patrolling the Gulf of Mexico apprehended three Mexican fisherman in a small blue skiff and confiscated around 500 pounds of illegally caught red snapper.

On a single day in August, U.S. officials intercepted four Mexican skiffs in U.S. waters carrying more than a thousand pounds of shark and more than 300 pounds of red snapper. The Coast Guard has found gillnets as long as five miles, full of protected species.

"We spend the majority of our time combating the illegal fishing issue," Ippolito said.

Many of the fisherman are based on a beach called Playa Bagdad, just a few miles south of the U.S. border on the Gulf of Mexico. The fishermen, many of them migrants from southern Mexico, live in shacks along the beach.

Given the concentration of fishermen along a single stretch of northern Mexico, many have come to believe they can catch more fish in U.S. waters, but that reasoning carries little scientific weight.

	<p>Mexican fishermen who are caught fishing illegally on the U.S. side of the maritime border are typically sent back to Mexico to be prosecuted and fined. But in practice, they're rarely prosecuted. The same fishermen continue returning to place their nets in U.S. waters.</p> <p>"During the six months ending in February 2021, the United States apprehended 84 repeat offenders," NOAA reported to Congress.</p> <p>The Coast Guard typically destroys the skiffs it seizes. Some of the confiscated fish end up as feed for the animals at a local Texas zoo.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 FBI: online sleuths led 2 arrests Capitol riot
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/nation-world/fbi-online-sleuths-posts-led-to-2-arrests-in-capitol-riot
GIST	<p>Information gathered and posted by a network of online sleuths led to the arrests Tuesday of two men charged separately with storming the U.S. Capitol last year, the FBI said in court filings.</p> <p>One of the men — Matthew Jason Beddingfield, 21, of North Carolina — also is charged with attacking police officers with a flagpole during the riot in Washington on Jan. 6, 2021.</p> <p>Beddingfield and Eric Gerwatowski, 31, of New Hyde Park, New York, were arrested in their respective home states Tuesday after their cases were unsealed.</p> <p>The FBI has cited information compiled by online sleuths in many of the more than 730 riot-related cases filed in federal court so far. In a court filing, the FBI says one of the leads that it received from "previously unaffiliated private citizens" helped investigators identify Beddingfield as a rioter.</p> <p>In March, HuffPost reported that online sleuths used facial recognition software to connect images of Beddingfield at the Capitol to his mugshot after a December 2019 arrest in North Carolina. One of the hashtags associated with Beddingfield was #NaziGrayHat, "possibly because he appeared to make a gesture that is commonly associated with the Nazis," an FBI agent said in a court filing.</p> <p>Beddingfield, 21, jumped over a barricade and charged at a group of Capitol police officers, jabbing at them with a metal flagpole that he brought with him, the filing says.</p> <p>More than an hour later, Beddingfield entered the Capitol and waved his American flag as he walked some laps, the agent wrote. After joining a group of rioters who tried to storm the Senate Wing, Beddingfield appeared to use his flagpole again to hit or try to hit law enforcement officers, according to the agent.</p> <p>Beddingfield, a resident of Johnston County, North Carolina, spent about 30 minutes inside the Capitol, the FBI says.</p> <p>Beddingfield was on probation for a criminal conviction in North Carolina, and his probation officer identified him in photos of the riot, the FBI says.</p> <p>Twitter users crowdsourcing information about rioters used the hashtag "#lordlonghair" to organize leads on the suspect the FBI has identified as Gerwatowski. The FBI said it reviewed Twitter posts featuring that hashtag and also received two tips about Gerwatowski from callers who said they knew him personally.</p> <p>A video showed Gerwatowski at the front of a crowd where police were trying to close doors to stop rioters from entering the Capitol. He pulled open one of the doors that police had just closed, turned to the crowd, yelled, "Let's Go!" and then entered the building, the FBI says.</p> <p>One of those officers told the FBI that he made a tactical decision not to engage Gerwatowski and other rioters.</p>

	<p>“The Officer said he made this decision because he had just come from the Gallery area of the Capitol where another rioter, Ashli Babbitt, was shot. The Officer told the FBI that he was exhausted, outnumbered, and had already been attacked and sprayed with several chemicals by rioters earlier in the day,” an FBI agent wrote.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Suspect in hit-run tied to Tacoma shooting
SOURCE	https://komonews.com/news/local/suspect-in-hit-and-run-connected-to-tacoma-drive-by-shooting-over-weekend
GIST	<p>TACOMA, Wash. — Tacoma police have tied a shooting suspect to a crash that badly injured a pedestrian over the weekend, according to a police spokesperson.</p> <p>That man is behind bars and police said he will soon be slapped with an attempted murder charge.</p> <p>“I heard the gunshots,” said Jake Schalk. “I didn’t really know what was happening,”</p> <p>Schalk remembers the black pickup truck he claims ran him and his girlfriend off the road at 35th and Union early Saturday morning before the driver allegedly fired shots at them.</p> <p>“I stepped out of the car,” Schalk said. “I told her to drive as fast as she could in the other direction.”</p> <p>He said his girlfriend Lily Valdez was hit four times- in the throat, abdomen, shoulder and hip- but was still able to get herself to the Tacoma Public Utilities guard shack nearby to call for help.</p> <p>Valdez was still on a ventilator as of Tuesday night, but the 32-year-old mother of two is expected to make a full recovery.</p> <p>Schalk said they don’t know the shooter and believe this was all completely random.</p> <p>“We have zero idea,” Schalk said. “We don’t know why anyone would have done it. I mean, there’s no one that we know or she knows that could have possibly wanted to kill her or me or anything like that.”</p> <p>Investigators said Tuesday they believe the shooting suspect in the black pickup allegedly sped away from the scene and plowed into a parked car about a mile away, badly hurting a nearby pedestrian.</p> <p>Police said the 47-year-old shooting suspect was still armed when they took him into custody for vehicular assault and DUI.</p> <p>“We know it’s just the beginning for the victims but the suspect will have his day in court,” said Wendy Haddow, Tacoma police officer.</p> <p>Now investigators believe their suspect is tied to both scenes. Police said he will be charged later this week with attempted first degree murder for the shooting and first degree assault.</p> <p>Police said the charging documents filed this week will provide more information about how officers caught up with the suspect.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 FAA: 11 planes report laser strikes
SOURCE	https://www.king5.com/article/news/local/11-laser-strikes-sea-tac-airport-1-hour-february-7/281-81297551-3209-4340-ba15-a5fbfc408faa
GIST	<p>SEATTLE — The Federal Aviation Administration says pilots reported nearly a dozen more lasers aimed at airliners in and around the Seattle-Tacoma International Airport on Monday night.</p> <p>This comes just days after four flights reported laser strikes.</p>

The reports Monday totaled 11 incidents between 8 and 9 p.m., with seven of them to the north and northwest of the airport, and four to the southeast.

Most of the strikes involved planes operated by Alaska and Horizon, which have the most flights arriving and departing the airport. Others were directed at Delta and one Southwest flight.

The laser hits are a safety issue in the cockpit and can cause damage to pilots' eyesight.

"It causes a lot of blindness, kind of a disorientating feeling you get – this dazzle across the whole windscreen," said Josh Sweeney, pilot and King Co. Sheriff's deputy.

Sweeney has been hit with lasers while flying the KCSO Guardian One helicopter.

Guardian One will often fly to help locate offenders using their specialized camera.

"This camera system...has a mapping program on it as well, so when we see what street, what address everything we're looking at. When we put that suspect on camera, then we can lead officers on the ground," said Sweeney.

The sheriff's office and the Washington State Patrol, which flies fixed-wing aircraft, have both had some success identifying and arresting laser offenders.

When they occur, laser hits are reported to air traffic controllers, who send the report to the Port of Seattle Police. Port police will attempt to speak with the pilots to try and nail down the locations, said Sea-Tac spokesman Perry Cooper.

But some of these reports were as far out as eight miles from the airport, which puts the planes much higher off the ground than the cases closer to the airport.

Using a laser against an aircraft is a felony in both state and federal law, and can lead to \$11,000 in civil penalties per incident from the FAA.

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HEADLINE	02/08 King Co. jail: acute drug intoxication death
SOURCE	https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/law-justice/man-dies-from-acute-drug-intoxication-while-in-custody-at-the-king-county-jail/
GIST	<p>A 34-year-old man died Friday at the King County Jail from acute drug intoxication, including methamphetamines, according to the King County Medical Examiner's Office.</p> <p>Erick Hernandez-Mendoza was identified by the medical examiner on Monday and his death was ruled an accident.</p> <p>The Seattle Police Department's Force Investigation Team is investigating his death because Hernandez-Mendoza died in custody, but as of Tuesday, investigators had not released any information, according to Sgt. Randy Huserik.</p> <p>The circumstances of Hernandez-Mendoza's death weren't immediately clear. A news release issued Friday by the King County Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention simply said "a 34-year-old inmate passed away," without providing any additional details.</p> <p>Jail records show Hernandez-Mendoza was booked into the SCORE Jail in Des Moines on Jan. 19, and was in custody through Feb. 4, though the records no longer indicate what misdemeanor crime he was being held on.</p>

	<p>At 12:35 a.m. on Feb. 4, Hernandez-Mendoza was transported from the SCORE Jail to the King County Jail in downtown Seattle on two felony warrants — one for possession of a stolen vehicle investigated by Renton police and the second for vehicle prowling that was investigated by Seattle police, said Noah Haglund, a spokesman for the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention.</p> <p>Court records show Hernandez-Mendoza was charged with stealing a motorcycle and crashing it in a ravine in Renton in January 2019; he was later charged with stealing stereo speakers, sunglasses and other items from a boat moored in Seattle’s South Lake Union neighborhood in June 2019.</p> <p>He was granted a conditional release in the Seattle case last year to attend in-patient treatment at PCN, say the records. (PCN is an apparent acronym for Pioneer Center North, a drug-rehabilitation program in Sedro-Woolley, Skagit County, operated by Pioneer Human Services.) Hernandez-Mendoza was able to run from a transport van, resulting in the issuance of a bench warrant in April, court records say.</p> <p>A bench warrant for his arrest in the Renton case was issued on Feb. 3, the day before he died.</p> <p>The jail’s news release did not indicate what time Hernandez-Mendoza died, but it was presumably within less than 24 hours of being booked into the Seattle jail. How he was able to obtain meth while in custody is unknown.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Govt. reveals evidence in first Jan 6 trial
SOURCE	https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/08/us/trial-jan-6-guy-wesley-reffitt.html
GIST	<p>Prosecutors have provided a revealing glimpse of their strategy for the first trial stemming from the attack on the Capitol, unveiling an inventory of the extensive evidence they intend to introduce, including surveillance videos, police communications, text messages, geolocation data and testimony from a Secret Service agent and the defendant’s own children.</p> <p>The defendant in the trial, set to begin on Feb. 28, is Guy Wesley Reffitt, an oil industry worker who prosecutors say was a member of the Texas Three Percenters, a far-right group connected to the gun rights movement. Mr. Reffitt stands accused of storming the Capitol with a pistol at his waist. The charges against him include interfering with law enforcement officers during a civil disorder and obstructing Congress’s duty to certify the results of the 2020 election.</p> <p>The trial — the earliest of several related to the events of Jan. 6, 2021, scheduled this year — will mark a major turning point in the Justice Department’s vast investigation of the Capitol attack. About 200 people have pleaded guilty so far to charges connected to the violent assault that disrupted the peaceful transfer of power. Of those, nearly 90 have already been sentenced.</p> <p>The Reffitt trial, which will take place in Federal District Court in Washington, is expected to be the first time that prosecutors will publicly offer evidence of the allegations they have made against scores of other similar defendants. Under what is sure to be enormous scrutiny, the prosecutors will have to demonstrate that law enforcement officers were “adversely affected” by the riot and that Mr. Reffitt was part of a pro-Trump mob that illegally stopped the work of Congress.</p> <p>To that end, the prosecutors have amassed an expansive array of witnesses and evidence, according to the list they filed Monday night. While much of the information they plan to introduce had been revealed in previous court papers and hearings, some of it was new, suggesting that they may have similarly undisclosed evidence waiting in the wings for future trials.</p> <p>Mr. Reffitt’s lawyer, William L. Welch III, did not respond to a request for comment on the government’s evidence, but his client has openly pushed back against accusations that he took part in anything untoward at the Capitol on Jan. 6. In a letter obtained by ProPublica last spring, Mr. Reffitt wrote of the attack, “There was no insurrection, no conspiracy, no sinister plan and no reason to think otherwise.”</p>

While Mr. Reffitt's trial is certain to attract attention for being the first, other larger and more complicated trials are tentatively scheduled for later in the year. [Four leaders of the far-right nationalist group the Proud Boys](#) are set to go on trial in Washington in May. And in July, prosecutors plan to [try 11 members of the Oath Keepers militia](#) — including its leader Stewart Rhodes — on charges of seditious conspiracy.

The Reffitt trial is likely to begin with an overview of the tumult on Jan. 6 offered by an officer who worked that day at the U.S. Capitol Police's command center, overseeing a video surveillance system, and radio and phone communications, prosecutors said. The officer will "explain the progression of the riot" through a compilation of surveillance videos from both inside and outside the building and will show the jury a separate video of former Vice President Mike Pence's motorcade leaving the east plaza of the Capitol at 1:57 p.m.

Three other Capitol officers are scheduled to testify about their direct interactions with Mr. Reffitt and others members of the mob, prosecutors said. These officers are expected to describe their experiences trying to control the crowd by firing pepper balls and other projectiles and to give accounts of failing to subdue Mr. Reffitt and his fellow rioters with chemical spray.

Much of the government's evidence came from search warrants executed on Mr. Reffitt's property.

Prosecutors say, for instance, that they have geolocation data from an app on Mr. Reffitt's iPhone that pinpoints his precise movements before, during and after the attack. They also say they have extracted from the phone several threads of messages he sent and received by text and via the chatting app Telegram.

Prosecutors are in possession of a 31-minute video that Mr. Reffitt apparently took during the riot with a panoramic camera. They also say they have another video, nearly two hours in length, entitled "Texas State Meeting — Zoom," which may be of an online event hosted by the Texas Three Percenters that Mr. Reffitt attended.

Among the other witnesses set to testify at the trial are a Secret Service agent and a former counsel to the Secretary of the Senate.

The agent intends to describe "emergency actions" taken on Jan. 6 to protect Mr. Pence and to show the jury a video of the former vice president and others hurrying down a staircase after rioters breached the building. The Senate aide will explain the certification of the Electoral College vote that was disrupted by the riot, a central part of the prosecution's case that Mr. Reffitt and others obstructed the work of Congress.

Prosecutors also revealed the existence of a new witness: a member of the Texas Three Percenters who traveled with Mr. Reffitt to Washington. The witness, who is known for now only as R.H., was granted immunity against prosecution and will testify about the preparations the two made for their trip, including the firearms and tactical gear that Mr. Reffitt brought with him, prosecutors say.

Perhaps the most emotional witnesses to testify at the trial will be Mr. Reffitt's teenage son and daughter. Prosecutors say the son, who was 18 at the time of attack, will tell the jury that he and his sister, then 16, spoke with their father when he returned from Washington after the riot and that Mr. Reffitt threatened to shoot them if they went to the F.B.I. about him. In a previous court hearing, the daughter testified that Mr. Reffitt threatened to put a bullet in her cellphone if she posted about him on social media.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Police: Seattle 20% rise in violent crime
SOURCE	https://www.seattlepi.com/local/seattlenews/article/Seattle-saw-20-increase-in-violent-crime-in-2021-16839411.php
GIST	Seattle saw substantial spikes in the number of aggravated assaults and robberies last year, which were largely responsible for the 20% overall increase in violent crime the city experienced in 2021, according

to the Seattle Police Department's year-end crime report.

That [report](#), released late last week, said the number of aggravated assaults that occurred in Seattle last year — 3,925 — is the most the city has seen in 10 years. It also represents a 24% increase over 2020 totals.

A record number of shootings in Seattle last year, some of which are classified as aggravated assaults, helped drive the assault figure to its 10-year high, the report said.

There were 31 fatal shootings and 143 non-fatal shootings in the city last year, the report said. The total number of shootings in Seattle last year represents a 43% increase over 2020 totals, and a 78% increase over 2019 figures.

In addition to fatal and non-fatal shootings, the police department also tracks shootings in which no one is injured. There was a 39% increase in this type of shootings last year compared to 2020, and an 88% increase compared to 2019.

When you put all of these figures together — the number of shootings with a victim, and the number of those without one — the total number of shootings for 2021 comes out to be 612. That total is the highest the department has seen since it began tracking both figures in 2012, and represents 40% and 86% increases over the 2020 and 2019 totals, respectively.

King County [also reported a record level](#) of gun violence last year.

The report did not explain what may have caused the total number of shootings in the area to skyrocket to unseen levels, but national experts have offered several theories — including rising unemployment, increasing gun sales and declines in some police patrols — to explain [the uptick in gun violence](#) the U.S. saw last year.

Despite the record number of shootings in Seattle last year, the number of homicides actually decreased by 25% compared to 2020. The report said 40 people were killed by another person in the city last year, down from 53 the year before. The number of reported rapes in Seattle also decreased by 6% last year.

The number of robberies, however, increased by 18% last year. The report said 1,752 people in the city had something taken by force — or taken with the threat of force — compared with 1,487 people in 2020.

The report also said property crime increased 9% overall in 2021. Acts that fall under the department's definition of property crime include arson, burglary, larceny and motor vehicle theft. The number of burglaries fell by 6%, while cases of arson, larceny and motor vehicle theft increased by 31%, 15% and 8%, respectively.

When you put the two categories together — violent crime and property crime — the report said crime in Seattle increased by 10% overall last year. Broken down, the department said it recorded 47,389 instances of crime last year, compared with 43,180 instances in 2020.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Pierce Co. Superior Court resume jury trials
SOURCE	https://www.thenewstribune.com/news/local/article258173203.html
GIST	<p>Pierce County Superior Court is resuming jury trials next week, ending a six-week suspension of new civil and criminal jury trials brought on by a surge in coronavirus cases early in December and January.</p> <p>Jury trials will resume Feb. 14, according to a news release announcing the change. Bench trials and other court proceedings were not affected by the suspension.</p>

	<p>In January, Superior Court administrator Chris Gaddis said the decision was made to suspend jury trials to keep staff and court participants safe while COVID-19 case numbers from the Omicron variant climbed. Now, Western Washington is seeing Omicron cases begin to fall.</p> <p>In Eastern Washington, experts speaking at a Department of Health briefing Feb. 2 still expected to see increasing case numbers for several more weeks. In its announcement, the Superior Court encouraged Pierce County residents attending court proceedings to wear a mask that provides a higher level of protection from COVID-19 than a cloth mask, such as N95 and KN95 masks.</p> <p>Superior Court facilities will also have a stockpile of surgical, N95 and KN95 masks available for court participants who want a more protective mask.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/09 FBI pushing junk science for convictions?
SOURCE	https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-fbi-keeps-pushing-junk-science-to-win-convictions?ref=home
GIST	<p>Late last year, a forensic firearms analyst in Wisconsin emailed a remarkable document to more than 200 of her colleagues across the country. It was a handout from an online lecture given by Jim Agar, the assistant general counsel for the FBI Crime Lab.</p> <p>For years, forensic firearms analysts have claimed the ability to examine the marks on a bullet found at a crime scene and match it to the gun that fired it—to the exclusion of all other guns. It can be powerfully persuasive to juries. But over the last decade or so, some scientists have cast doubt on the claim.</p> <p>Forensic firearms analysis falls into a subcategory of forensics colloquially known as “pattern matching.” In these specialties, an analyst looks at a piece of evidence from a crime scene and compares it with a piece of evidence associated with a suspect.</p> <p>The most damning criticism of the field came in a 2016 report by the President’s Council of Advisers on Science and Technology, or PCAST, which found that “firearms analysis currently falls short of the criteria for foundational validity,” and that the studies the field’s practitioners often cite to support their work are poorly designed and “seriously underestimate the false positive rate.”</p> <p>After decades of deferring to these forensic analysts, a handful of judges started to heed the warnings from scientists, and have put limits on what some forensic witnesses can say in court. Those decisions have sparked a defensive backlash in the forensics community, along with rebukes from law enforcement officials and prosecutors.</p> <p>Agar’s document is part of that backlash. In the two-page handout, Agar instructs firearms analysts on how to circumvent judges’ restrictions on unscientific testimony. He even suggests dialogue for prosecutors and analysts to recite if challenged. Most controversially, Agar advises analysts to tell judges that any effort to restrict their testimony to claims backed by scientific research is tantamount to asking them to commit perjury.</p> <p>Agar’s document was so volatile, it was upbraided by the Texas Forensic Science Commission (TFSC). That agency—the only one of its kind—was formed in the wake of revelations that bogus expert testimony likely caused the state to convict and execute an innocent man, and is tasked with ensuring that expert testimony given in Texas courtrooms is scientifically valid. The TFSC called Agar’s advice to firearm analysts “irredeemably faulty,” and stated that it “runs counter to core principles in science.”</p> <p>“This is just really unbelievable,” Ellen Yaroshefsky, a professor of legal ethics at Hofstra University, told The Daily Beast after reviewing Agar’s memo. “He’s encouraging false testimony and he’s undermining respect for the judiciary. I mean, he’s saying that if a judge says you can’t give unscientific testimony, you’re being forced to commit perjury? It’s just absurd.”</p> <p>A Short History of FBI Forensic Blunders</p>

Agar's employer, the FBI crime lab, is often touted as the most prestigious forensics institution in the world. But the lab has also overseen some embarrassing, high-profile scandals.

In 2004, FBI analysts erroneously matched a partial fingerprint from the Madrid train bombings to [falsely implicate](#) Oregon lawyer Brandon Mayfield. A year later, [the agency conceded](#) there's no scientific evidence to support "comparative bullet lead analysis," a subfield of forensics based on the premise that each batch of bullets has a unique chemical signature. For years, analysts had cited this theory to claim that a bullet found at a crime scene could only have come from, say, a box of bullets found in a suspect's home. It just wasn't true.

In 2015, the agency was forced to cop to an even bigger scandal: For decades, its analysts had claimed an ability to match [hair and carpet fibers](#) that just isn't scientifically feasible. One review found FBI analysts had made statements unsupported by science in 95 percent of the cases in which they testified. Such testimony sent hundreds of people to prison, including to death row. Those analysts also [trained dozens—perhaps hundreds—of state and local analysts](#) in the same dubious methods, potentially corrupting thousands more cases.

None of that has appeared to chasten the agency. Instead, the FBI and the Justice Department have been [stubborn and defensive](#) in the face of criticism, rejecting offers from scientific organizations to audit their methods and blind test their analysts. DOJ officials have assured the public that they'd conduct their own internal reviews, but have then been opaque about when or how or even if those reviews were conducted, or what they found. Agar's handout to firearms analysts suggests little has changed.

The core problem with pattern matching fields of forensics is that they're inherently subjective. In addition to firearms analysis, they include specialties like comparing a hair found on the victim with a hair from the suspect's head, or pry marks found on a door frame to a screwdriver found in the suspect's house, or a bite mark on the victim to a mold of the suspect's teeth.

In nearly all of these fields, there has been little effort to identify how frequently the characteristics that might distinguish one piece of evidence from another occur among the entire population of those particular things. You can't say that because a hair is a particular color or thickness it definitely came from a particular suspect unless you also know how often that color and thickness occur together in the general population. And in a field like tool mark analysis, this part of the equation may not even be knowable. For an analyst to say the pry marks on a door frame could only have been produced by a particular screwdriver, for example, would require that analyst to know for certain that no other object on Earth could possibly have created similar marks.

Most of the fields of forensics were developed not by scientists, but by law enforcement to generate leads or to help convict suspects once they had been identified. Until recently, neither the analysts nor their methods had been subjected to the rigors of scientific inquiry—to processes like peer review or blind proficiency testing. Most also aren't amenable to scientific concepts, such as calculating a margin for error.

It's helpful to contrast these specialties with DNA testing, which actually did come from the scientific community. We know precisely how often certain DNA markers occur in the human population. This means that when scientists generate a DNA profile from a spot of blood at the scene of a crime, an analyst can say exactly how likely it is that the sample came from a particular suspect. Tellingly, unlike other forensic specialists, DNA analysts tend to shy away from terms like "match." Instead, they state the statistical probability that a sample could have come from anyone other than the suspect.

Moreover, for most pattern matching fields, even if it *were* possible to calculate how often distinguishing characteristics occur, there has been little effort to gauge how proficient the analysts are at actually identifying and distinguishing those characteristics. That may be because the tests that *have* been done are disconcerting. In one proficiency test given to bite mark analysts, for example, the participants [couldn't even agree](#) on whether the test marks were human bites, animal bites, or some other injury.

The field of forensic firearms or ballistics analysis, the subject of Agar's memo, rests on two underlying premises. The first is that when a gun is fired, it leaves unique, identifiable marks on the bullet—marks that can't be replicated by any other gun. The second is that, by examining these marks, firearms analysts can objectively and reliably match them to the gun that fired them, to the exclusion of all other guns.

[There is no scientific research](#) to support either premise. At best, in some cases, an analyst could say with some certainty that a particular gun did *not* fire a particular bullet.

[Alicia Carriquiry](#) is director at the Center for Statistics and Applications in Forensic Evidence at Iowa State. She and her team have been assembling a database of the ballistics marks left on bullets. [Their research](#) thus far has indicated [there's little support for the claim](#) that every gun leaves unique marks on the bullets it fires—or least not in a way that's useful for distinguishing one gun from another.

Controlled studies have also shown that the entire field of forensic firearms analysis is inherently subjective. The Houston Forensic Science Center is one of the few crime labs in the country [to take a strictly scientific approach to forensics](#). Director Peter Stout regularly administers [blind proficiency tests](#) to his analysts. He first gave his ballistics analysts “sensitivity tests,” in which they were asked to determine whether two bullets were fired by the same gun. The analysts reached the correct conclusion about 76 percent of the time—leaving a lot of room for reasonable doubt.

Stout also gave his analysts “specificity tests,” in which they were asked to determine whether two bullets were fired by *different* guns. Here, the success rate dipped to 34 percent.

Carriquiry points [to another recent sensitivity study](#)—funded by the FBI itself—in which the analysts' success rate was just 48 percent. “A dispassionate observer would say that they would have made fewer mistakes if they had flipped a coin,” Carriquiry says. “Given that astonishingly low accuracy, it seems pure hubris to be recommending to examiners to ‘push back.’”

A Repeating Pattern

In a series of decisions in the 1990s, the U.S. Supreme Court made judges the gatekeepers of science in the courtroom: Judges would determine which experts were credible enough to be heard by juries, and which were not.

But judges aren't trained in science; they're trained in the law. So it should come as no surprise that they've taken on this responsibility as lawyers might, not as scientists do. Because we have an adversarial legal system, for example, they've taken a similar approach to expert testimony. They tend to let each side bring in its own expert, let the experts fight it out on the witness stand, and then leave it to the jury to decide which expert is more credible.

The problem with an adversarial approach is that the skills it takes to persuade a jury aren't necessarily the same skills it takes to be a thoughtful and careful scientist. In fact the two are often contradictory, and juries crave certainty. An expert who is willing to say, “this is the way it is,” will often seem more persuasive than an expert who says, “I don't think we can say either way,” even though the latter is often more accurate.

[Since the first fingerprint case in 1910](#), pattern matching analysts have given juries the certainty they crave. It wasn't until revolutionary DNA testing began in the early 1990s that we started to discover that such testimony was sending innocent people to prison.

Citing these and other studies, defense attorneys and reform advocates have asked judges to limit firearms analysts only to conclusions supported by science. For example, an analyst could say, “I can't exclude the possibility that this particular bullet was fired by that particular gun,” but they wouldn't be allowed to say “this gun and *only this gun* could have fired that bullet.”

Until recently, judges routinely denied those requests.

This brings us to conflict between law and science: Science is constantly changing and evolving with new evidence and new testing. The rule of law requires stability and predictability, which is why courts tend to rely on precedent. Because forensics was born out of law enforcement, not science, by the time scientists began disproving the core premises of various fields of forensics, those fields had already gained a foothold in the legal system. It takes a lot to overturn precedent. So most judges have taken the path of least resistance, and continue to allow those fields into evidence.

It's only in recent years, and only because of DNA testing and the growing body of scientific research, that [judges have become more skeptical](#) of pattern matching forensics.

The first shot across the bow came in 2009, when the National Academy of Sciences published [the first comprehensive, scientific review](#) of forensics, which found that analysts routinely give testimony unsupported by scientific research, even though it's often presented to and perceived by jurors as science.

In the wake of that study, the Obama administration created the [National Commission on Forensic Sciences \(NCFS\)](#), a large group of lawyers, scientists, judges, and statisticians tasked with identifying the shortcomings in forensic and prescribing solutions and best practices.

In 2016, the aforementioned presidential advisory group PCAST issued [the most damning report on forensics](#) to date, calling for outright prohibitions on fields like bite-mark analysis, and providing a scathing critique of other pattern-matching fields.

The reaction to these reports from law enforcement officials has been derisive and defensive. When the PCAST report came out, then-Attorney General Loretta Lynch [abruptly dismissed it](#), declaring that the Justice Department “will not be adopting the recommendations.” Groups like the National District Attorneys Association attacked the scientists’ motives, and [accused them of harboring a political agenda](#). Other defenders of the status quo have argued that only other forensic specialists—not scientists or statisticians—are qualified to evaluate the accuracy and reliability of their peers, a claim akin to stating only tarot card readers are qualified to evaluate the scientific validity of tarot cards.

If the Obama administration’s approach to forensics was contradictory—it provided a platform for scientists to expose the problems, while its law enforcement leaders refused to do anything about them—the Trump administration’s approach was to shut down the discussion altogether.

One of the first acts of then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions was to [allow the NCFS charter to expire](#). Instead, Trump’s DOJ announced it would be conducting its own internal review of federal forensic practices to “give clear guidance to what the Department’s forensics examiners may discuss in a courtroom.”

The Trump administration put a former prosecutor named Ted Hunt [in charge of the review](#). Hunt is an outspoken defender of the status quo. He was one of just two members of the NCFS to vote against its recommendation that pattern matching analysts be prohibited from making claims to juries that aren’t backed by science.

In the waning days of the Trump administration, a mysterious [press release](#) and [paper](#) appeared on the DOJ website—both unsigned [but likely authored by Hunt](#). They essentially waved away the PCAST report as irrelevant and misguided and advised DOJ analysts to ignore it. The memo and paper [were quickly denounced](#) by groups like the [Center for Science and Democracy](#) and the Union of Concerned Scientists. But the Biden administration has yet to rescind or contradict the documents, so they remain the DOJ’s official position.

It’s in this context that we get the Agar document. Over the many decades in which police and prosecutors have benefited from judicial authority over the use of science in the courtroom, they’ve welcomed and endorsed it. Now that scientists are finally breaking through—overcoming the hurdles of precedent and adversarial justice—a high-ranking FBI official is no longer endorsing judicial authority, but offering strategies to undermine it.

“The Agar memo would be laughable if it was not so dangerous,” says Carriquiry. “His recommendation to examiners to push back and deny all possibility of errors or uncertainty runs contrary to science.”

Agar may well believe that forensic firearms analysis is scientific (neither Agar nor the FBI responded to requests for an interview). To be charitable, it may be that he isn’t advising analysts to give testimony he personally knows to be untrue. What is true is that the overwhelming majority of the scientific community disagrees with him.

“If 99 percent of scientists believe there’s no scientific basis to say this, but 1 percent say maybe there is, we can’t let the state present it to a jury as if it’s just an honest disagreement among experts,” says Yaroshefsky. “At some point, you have to say okay, there’s an overwhelming consensus here.”

Willful Ignorance

The FBI and DOJ claim to run the most elite, scientifically sound crime labs in the world while, at the same time, refusing to open those labs to review by outside scientists. They want to tell jurors their forensics are science, but they don’t want scientists scrutinizing their forensics.

Agar’s handout makes clear that he’s offering guidance to analysts on his own behalf, and not officially for the FBI or DOJ. But the fact that the attorney who advises the country’s premier crime lab—the lab that often trains analysts in state crime labs—would distribute such advice to hundreds of ballistics analysts ought to be alarming.

What Agar advises in the document is, at its core, no different than [hair/carpet fiber](#) and [bullet composition](#) scandals from the FBI’s past. Now, as before, forensic analysts are corrupting trials by making statements to juries that, at best, are unsupported by scientific research—and, at worst, are contradicted by it. And now, as before, they’ve been training and advising state and local analysts to do the same.

But there is one important—and chilling—difference. Since the onset of modern DNA testing, the potential for a wrongful conviction due to faulty testimony from, say, a bite mark or hair fiber analyst is far less likely than it once was. Hair fibers typically contain DNA, and bite marks (if they’re real bite marks) typically include saliva. So in most of these cases, there’s no need for a pattern matching analysis. Law enforcement officials can go straight to DNA. Even if they do turn to a forensic analyst, DNA testing will quickly contradict any analyst who gets it wrong.

The blast radius of the DNA revolution should have hit *all* pattern matching fields, and called them into question. Instead, it was mostly limited to fields involving biological material—fields that DNA testing could directly disprove.

But other fields, like ballistics matching, [tire tread analysis](#), and [shoe print analysis](#), are just as scientifically dubious and can be just as subjective and susceptible to [cognitive bias](#) as other pattern matching fields. It’s a near-certainty that these too produce wrongful convictions. Even without DNA, we know forensic firearms analysts played a role in the wrongful convictions of [Curtis Flowers in Mississippi](#) and [Patrick Pursely in Illinois](#).

Bullets, of course, aren’t made of biological material, and shooting someone from a distance is unlikely to leave behind probative DNA. This means that for shootings, we’re far less likely to have the slam-dunk proof of a wrongful conviction the courts often require.

This is probably why, despite the few rulings Agar laments in his handout, ballistics matching still retains more credibility with most judges than other pattern matching fields. It hasn’t been proven wrong as often, not because it isn’t just as flawed, but because the science-driven technology that has conclusively proven other wrongful convictions just isn’t applicable in these cases.

	In the end, so long as high-ranking officials at agencies like the FBI continue to support and encourage unscientific testimony, the wrongful convictions will continue. We're just far less likely to ever find out about them.
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HEADLINE	02/08 North Carolina shooting: 4 injured
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/year-shot-north-carolina-celebration-life-service/story?id=82744123
GIST	<p>A search is ongoing in North Carolina on Tuesday for assailants who shot four mourners, including a 6-year-old child and a teenager, at an outdoor celebration of life service for a homicide victim, according to police.</p> <p>Wilmington Police Chief Donny Williams asked for the public's help in identifying the suspect or suspects in the shooting, which came during a surge in gun violence in major cities across the nation.</p> <p>"Six-year-old kids are supposed to be hurt from falling off bicycles, from ... tripping and falling, not from gunfire," an emotional Williams said in a video statement. "Whoever did this, you are a low-down dirty coward, and you shouldn't be able to look at yourself in the mirror each day."</p> <p>The shooting unfolded about 6:40 p.m. Sunday in northwest Wilmington, where a group was holding a celebration of life service at the spot where a 33-year-old man was fatally shot on Jan. 27, Williams said.</p> <p>"They fired gunfire toward a crowd of people, and the result was four people being struck, including a child," Williams said.</p> <p>He said police officers were alerted by a ShotSpotter gunshot detection system, and when they got to the scene they initially found two men suffering from bullet wounds. While on the scene, officers discovered two more people shot, including the 6-year-old child and a 16-year-old boy, Williams said.</p> <p>The teenager was critically injured, while the other victims sustained non-life-threatening injuries, Williams said.</p> <p>"It's important that we get these individuals and we get them in jail," Williams said.</p> <p>He asked anyone with knowledge about the shooting or the shooters to contact police, adding that anonymous information can be shared with investigators through the police department's tip line.</p> <p>"We are asking for the community's help in identifying who did this," Williams said. "This is ridiculous, and this community should be outraged."</p> <p>The shooting came as the country is grappling with a rash of high-profile shootings in major cities, including New York where two police officers died after being shot last month when they responded to a domestic call, and in Virginia where two other police officers were fatally shot on Feb. 1 while confronting a gunman at Bridgewater College.</p> <p>According to the Gun Violence Archive, an online site that tracks shooting across the country, 32 children aged 11 or younger have been shot to death in incidents across the country in this year, and another 75 have been injured.</p>
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HEADLINE	02/08 Arrest: deadly no-knock warrant killing
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/teen-arrested-connection-search-warrant-led-amir-lockes/story?id=82745199
GIST	A 17-year-old has been arrested in connection to the search warrant that led to the death of Amir Locke, a 22-year-old who was shot and killed by Minneapolis police officers executing a "no-knock" search warrant.

Locke, who was fatally shot last Wednesday, was not named in the no-knock warrant, according to civil rights attorney Ben Crump. The warrant was executed on behalf of St. Paul police, who were searching for a homicide suspect.

Body camera video showed officers executing the no-knock search warrant and finding Locke, who had been sleeping under a blanket on the couch and holding a gun.

Locke is seen holding a gun as he sits up and was shot less than 10 seconds after officers entered the room, still covered in the blanket.

The suspect, Locke's 17-year-old cousin, was arrested Monday afternoon in Winona, Minnesota, the St. Paul Police Department said Tuesday.

Officers from the Minneapolis Police Department had been to the apartment where Locke was killed 10 times in the last seven months for 911 calls related to threats, disturbances, narcotic activity, suspicious activity and domestic abuse, according to 911 calls obtained by ABC News.

The most recent 911 calls had been placed for "unknown trouble" on Feb. 1 and a "suspicious person" on Jan. 19, according to police records.

Police had obtained a search warrant for the apartment, which belongs to a family friend of the suspect's brother, because staff at the apartment building told investigators that the suspect had a key to the unit and because he was present during numerous occasions when officers responded to 911 calls.

In a statement, Crump said the family and their legal team is aware of the arrest, adding that Locke's cousin was not in the apartment at the time of the shooting.

"All available information confirms that Amir was never a target of that investigation, of those search warrants," Crump said. "We must remain focused on the fact that Amir was an innocent young man of a raid gone terribly wrong, who is now the latest statistic and victim of the dangerous and intrusive no-knock warrant techniques that must be banned."

Over the weekend, a caravan of about 50 vehicles drove through Minneapolis demanding justice for Locke, some in front of the home of interim Police Chief Amelia Huffman, demanding that she resign from her post.

The officer who shot Locke, identified by police as Mark Hanneman, was placed on administrative leave pending the outcome of the investigation, in accordance with department policy.

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HEADLINE	02/08 Gun violence interrupters intervention
SOURCE	https://abcnews.go.com/US/gun-violence-interrupters-point-promise-intervention-programs/story?id=82723062
GIST	<p>In North Lawndale, a neighborhood on the West Side of Chicago laden with crime and poverty, Derek Brown, founder of Boxing Out Negativity, has taken the fight against gun violence off the street and into the ring.</p> <p>His program provides mentorship and a safe space for at-risk youth who are more likely to be swept up into street life.</p> <p>"I'm a counselor, I'm a teacher, I'm a motivator, I'm whatever our children need," Brown told ABC News. "Boxing took troubled kids and started programming them. In order to be 'bad' here, you have to run at least five miles a day, exercise all day, repeat the same techniques over and over and over until you get it mastered."</p>

"We're not just fighting our way inside the ring, we're fighting our way through life," Brown continued. "Our everyday objective is to fight for ourselves, our families and friends and communities."

As a former gang member who transitioned out of street life at 28, Brown, now 45, said he is acutely aware of environmental factors that lead young people down the wrong path.

Trumale Coleman, Brown's 18-year-old mentee who has been in the boxing program since he was 8, said the lessons on discipline and dedication provided him with the tools to see his higher potential and navigate through an environment where violence is the norm.

"I never even thought I would do boxing. I never even thought I had as much knowledge as he gave me. He [Brown] is not my biological father; he is my spiritual father. I learn more everyday, and what he teaches me, I teach everyone else," Coleman said.

Experts say examining the environment that perpetuates gun violence is key to understanding the latest uptick in communities of color.

Dr. David Ansell, the senior vice president for community health equity at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago and author of "The Death Gap: How Inequality Kills," told ABC News that public health and poverty are directly correlated to high rates of gun violence.

"[West Chicago] has one of the highest COVID death rates in the city; it also has high rates of gun violence. These things are co-prevalent," Ansell said. "What ties it all together is trauma over time and how people react to various traumas. Some of that trauma gets acted out in behavioral ways, with either mental illness, addiction or violence."

Chicago Police department data showed that [48 people were killed](#) in shooting homicides in January, ABC station WLS in Chicago reported. That's a 13% decline compared to January 2021, police said.

There were 219 people shot last month, compared to 241 around the same time last year, the data showed.

"We're seeing reductions in involvement in gun violence. We're seeing reductions in victimization rates among the [community-led outreach organizations], all heading in the right direction," Andrew Papachristos, professor of sociology at Northwestern University and director at the Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative.

"It's hard to prove," he said. "It's especially hard to prove because of the national surge in gun violence we just saw happen in Chicago. But even during COVID, even during this national surge in gun violence, we're seeing positive direction in street outreach."

Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative (N3) is a research collective that works with Northwestern University's Institute for Policy Research to engage with community organizations and policymakers to address social problems in Chicago. Researchers have been studying the impact of community street outreach programs, and evidence shows that credible messengers -- people who grow up in the same neighborhoods they serve -- have a promising impact on lowering gun violence.

A 2021 [N3 report evaluated the outreach program](#) of Chicago CRED, anti-violence organization that provides mentorship and resources to at-risk youth, to identify how the use of credible messengers impacts gun violence in neighborhoods with high crime rates. The report identified young adults in the program to see how they perceive violence around them and examined how CRED engaged with them.

Early results from the study showed that there was evidence of a reduction in gunshot victimization and violent crime arrests among CRED participants.

"Overall, the number of fatal and non-fatal gunshot injuries across all CRED participants decreased by nearly 50%, and the number of arrests for violent crimes fell 48% in the 18 months following the start of participation in the program," according to the report.

The average outreach worker in Chicago is a 44-year old Black man who's been incarcerated, who got involved with gangs and the criminal justice system around the age 13, according to Papachristos. Twenty-five percent of outreach workers are Latino, and about 20% are women, he said, explaining that credible messengers can have a unique impact on the ability to reach disenfranchised members of low-income communities who are often out of reach by law enforcement and city officials.

"When we look at their lived experience, they have long histories of involvement and victimization. They've been victimized when they were young. They have a long history of involvement with gangs. They've been incarcerated and they largely have lived in the same community their entire life. So they're quite familiar with what gun violence looks like in their neighborhood. They know the families, they know the people, they know the neighborhoods, they know the parks, they know the stories, and they're part of those stories," Papachristos said.

"This is the workforce that is charged with tackling gun violence," he said, "and in some ways, they are the only workforce that can reach people that are at risk and bring them into these sorts of services."

He added, "The question is not about, 'Did they reduce violence by 50 or 60%,' but rather, 'How many lives were saved today?'"

Tio Hardiman, executive director of [Violence Interrupters Inc.](#), an anti-violence program focused on combating the culture of violence, uses peace circle and conflict resolution trainings to help at-risk youth de-escalate disagreements and avoid deadly retaliation.

"The violence interrupter trainings that I facilitate is very important because we have an opportunity to actually help young men and educate them on how to think on a higher level. That's why the training is so important. We focus on the do's and don'ts of conflict resolution and gang mediation," Hardiman said. "The work of credible messengers is very impactful because it's about saving lives. Last year, in 2021, Violence Interrupters Inc mediated around 60 conflicts that could have turned deadly."

For Patricia Hillard, a West Garfield Park outreach worker, violence interruption work is about meeting people where they are.

That means doing outreach work on "Heroin Highway," a stretch of West Garfield Park battered by the opioid crisis. It's the same area Hillard said she dwelled when she was addicted to drugs. After years of sobriety, she said she found a new purpose in helping others.

Now a salaried employee with the [Institute for Nonviolence Chicago](#), Hillard said that the residents she mentors trusts her, because she was once them.

"I was with them. I was with the drug dealer. I was the person out here running to get drugs. I did it all, and I survived," Hillard said. "A lot of the guys around here, who are doing the shooting and the sliding, they know me. So I've actually been able to intervene with guns drawn."

Investment in gun violence interruption programs is taking shape in major cities and states around the country.

President Joe Biden showed his support for community-led anti-violence programs during his visit to New York City last Thursday, where he discussed his and Mayor Eric Adams' plans to tackle gun crimes. Biden's Build Back Better plan proposes a \$5 billion dollar investment in community-led programs, but that legislation remains stalled in Congress.

Papachristos said financial investment in street outreach as a profession could have major implications for the reduction of violence over time.

"You can look at any map of any city, and the areas that have the highest levels of homicide also have the highest levels of poverty, dropout rates, low birth weight, exposure to toxins like lead. ... It's not that most poor people are criminals. It's just that crime tends to concentrate by design in communities that lack resources and opportunities," Papachristos said. "It's vital right now more than ever, especially as you're getting the attention from the White House and the State House, to find out how do we develop this workforce? What tools do they need?"

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